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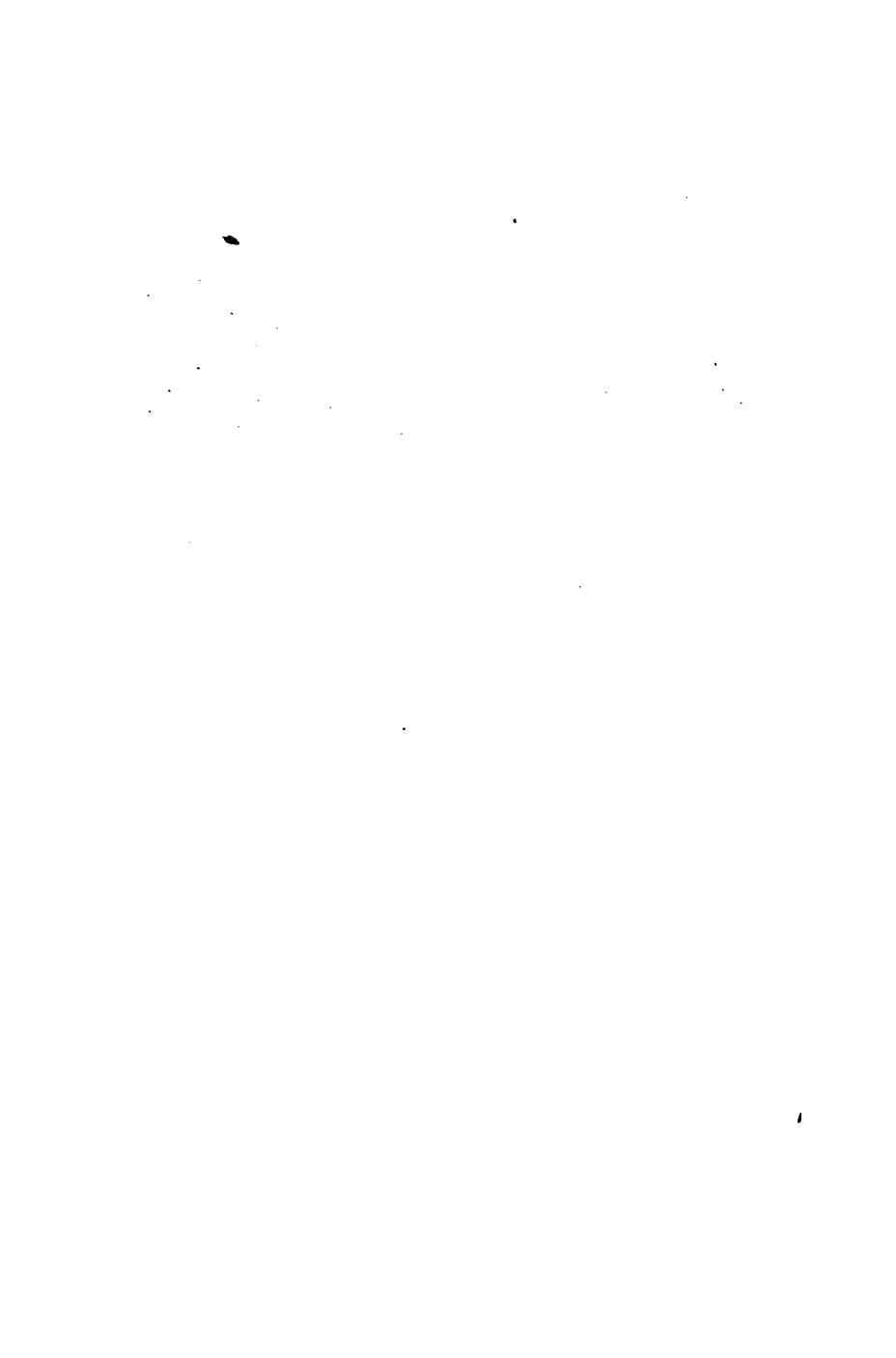


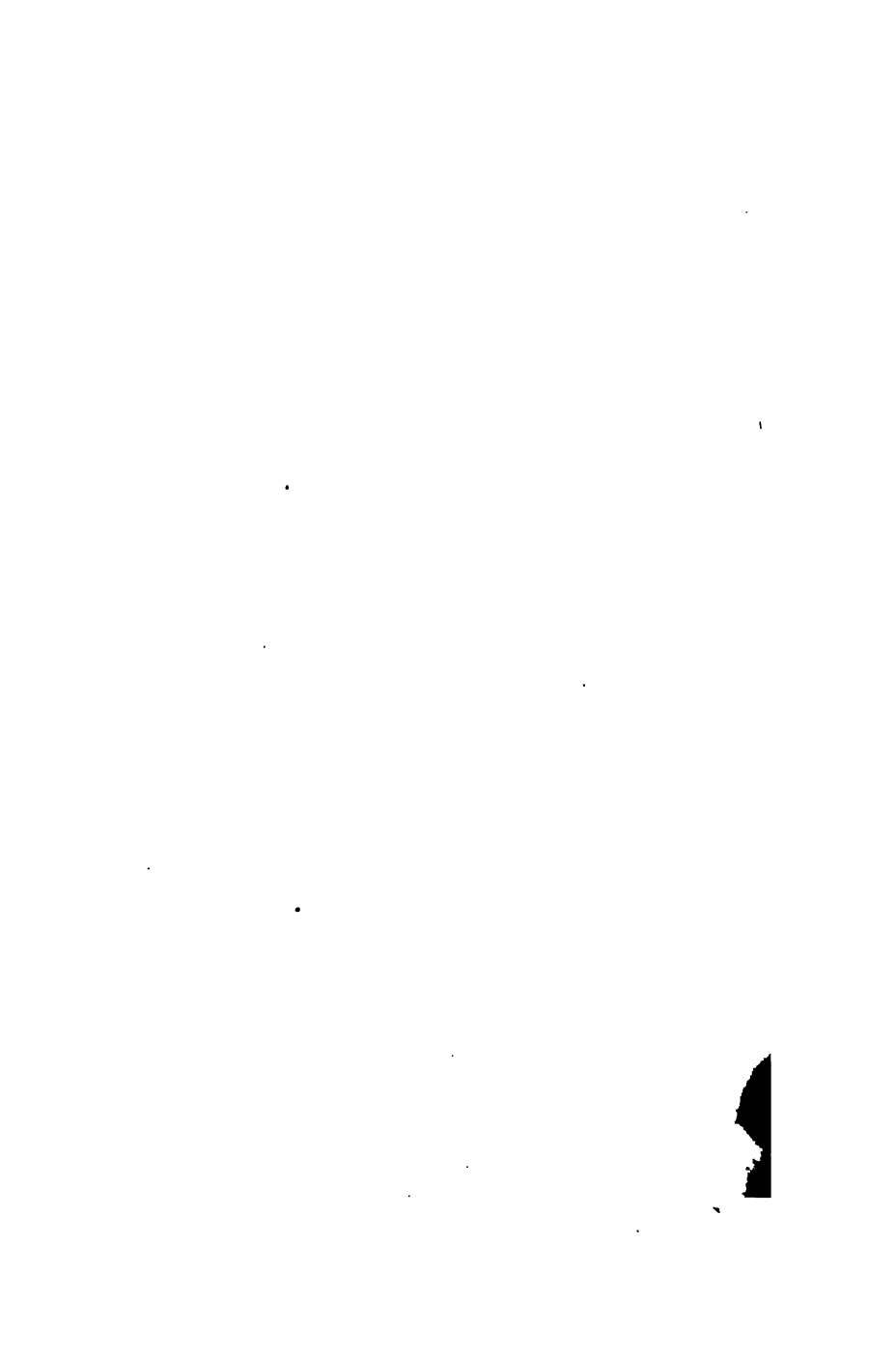
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CHRISTMAS HOURS.

BY THE AUTHOR

**OF "THE HOMEWARD PATH," "BEGINNING AND GROWTH OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE, OR THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHER."**

"Glory to God in the highest, on earth Peace, good-will towards men."

**BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.**

M DCCC LVIII.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY
H. O. HOUGHTON AND COMPANY.

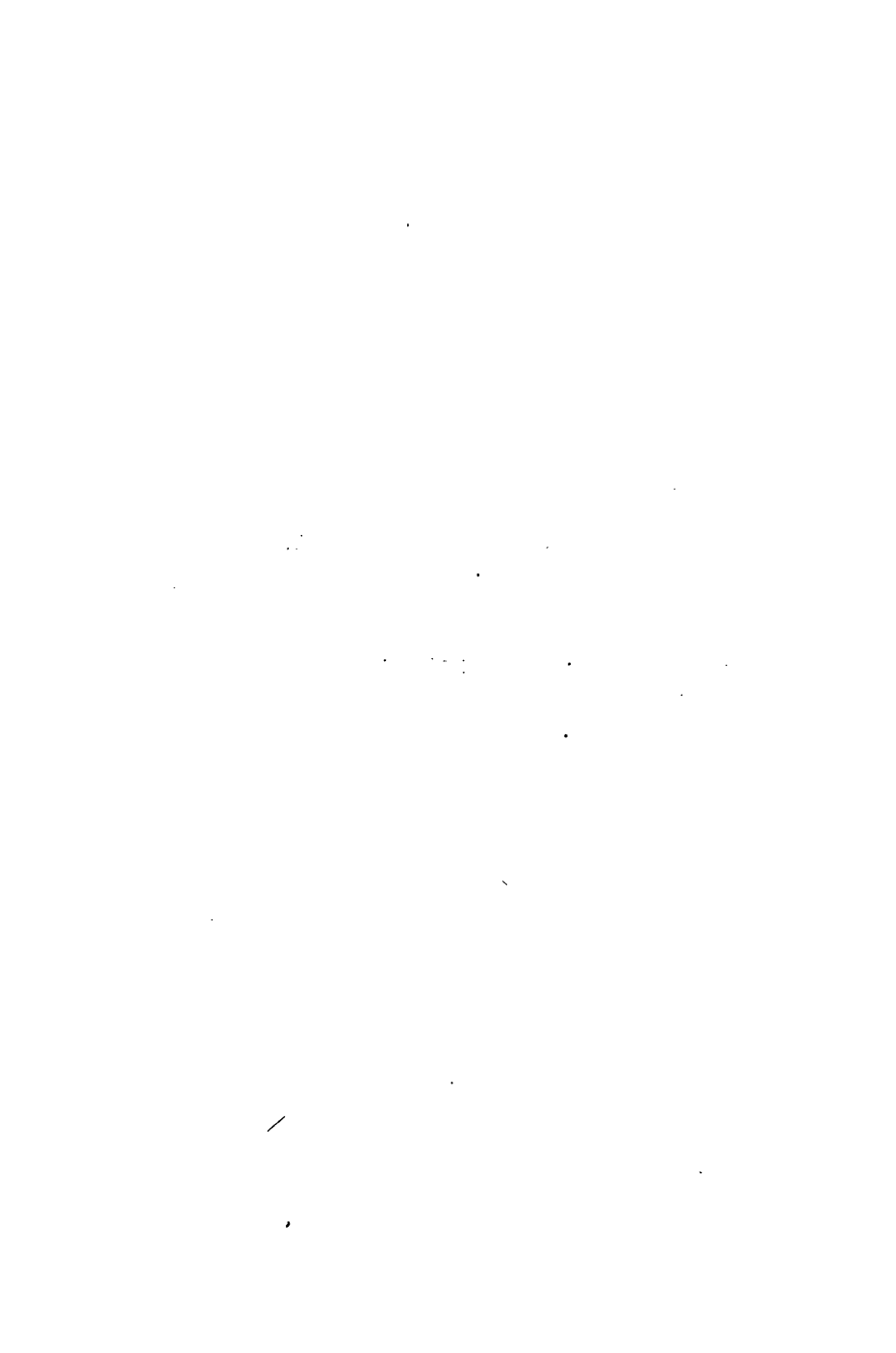


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CHRISTMAS EVE.

PART I.



CHRISTMAS EVE.

THE sun had already set, and the clear, cold, northwest wind drifted the newly fallen snow in every direction, piling it in strange, fantastic heaps by the road side, covering the rough stone walls with its white drapery, hiding every blackened and time-worn dwelling in its pure and spotless robe, and mantling field and forest with a beauty all its own. Colder and colder blew the wind, as we rapidly hastened along the road to the merry music of the sleigh-bells, while from time to time a sudden gust would drive the large flakes of snow into our faces, making us glad to seek a momentary shelter beneath the old "buffalo," which "Aunty" was sure we should need before seeing the bright warm fire that awaited us at our journey's end.

On and on we went, the open fields were past, and now we drove through the dark pines, where the white snow lay in meek beauty upon every tree and shrub, and the noble hemlocks bowed their green and graceful branches beneath their soft burden, as if in quiet homage to the Power that silently clothed the earth in such new and wonderful grace.

“ Every pine and fir and hemlock,
Wore ermine too dear for an earl ;
And the smallest branch of the elm-tree,
Was fringed inch-deep with pearl.”

And now a heavier gust swept through the narrow valley, and as the gray old trunks were swayed hither and thither, and the wind murmured in wild and fitful cadence through the dark boughs, it seemed to say, “ Aye, Christmas is indeed coming, —the storm has passed, and robed are we already in our festive garments.” And then as the wind died away, and for a few moments a perfect stillness reigned through the dark old woods, and the evening star beamed upon us through the opening boughs, in its calm and quiet beauty, a deeper and

holier voice whispered to our souls, of Him who hushed the raging of the waters amid the fearful storm, saying, "Peace, be still;" and of that Star of Bethlehem, which led the shepherds to the infant Saviour, whose birth we were this night to celebrate.

And now the cheerful lights from the village beam upon us, glancing fitfully hither and thither as we glide along the winding road. Nearer and nearer they come, and now we hear the sound of distant voices, and as we slowly climb the steep hill, on every side we see that active preparations are making for the glad festival of the morrow. Beautiful arches of evergreen are thrown across all the principal streets, standing in striking contrast with the soft white carpet of the earth beneath, while almost every window is wreathed in evergreen and holly, the poorer dwellings having at least a branch of spruce placed against a single pane. Bright fires blaze in rooms that seldom rejoice in such cheerful light, and groups of children flit hither and thither, eager and animated, preparing Christmas boxes or orna-

menting Christmas trees, surpassing, in their estimation at least, all that even a fairy's magic wand could ever devise.

And now we drive more rapidly forward. Only one turn more, and there stands the dear old house, and the large elm in front, whose icy boughs glisten in the clear moonlight, just as in the days of childhood,—and there too is the dark pine that shaded the chamber window, seeming to my childish imagination to “rest close against the sky.” And now the well-known gate, with its heavy hinges, swings wide open,—there is a momentary hush within, and then a sudden shout from a dozen merry voices, and the joyous exclamation, “Cousin Mary's come! cousin Mary's come!” And the old hall door is thrown open, and happy faces beam upon me, and laughing voices shout, “Merry Christmas, merry Christmas! welcome home, dear Coz!” And the great wood fire blazes bright on the old-fashioned hearth, shedding its own cheerfulness upon the time-worn walls and the heavy furniture of the apartment, consecrated by so many dear associations. And in the same

easy-chair, with its dark chintz covering, by the side of the fire, sat my dear old Grandmother, looking as tranquil and loving as ever, and enjoying the merry sports of the little ones as highly as the youngest. But the opposite seat was vacant, and the unbidden tear started, when I recalled the last family meeting a few years before, and those who *then* met around the festive board.

“ Ah, cousin, just too late for tea,” said Lizzie ;
“ it’s too bad ! ”

“ But you shan’t lose your supper,” said dear little Nell, as she sprang into my arms, “ for I’ve saved my best cake on purpose for you,—and the *next* best for Kitty.”

“ And here’s a good warm seat by the fire,” said George, “ and do pray thaw out those frozen hands of yours, for I declare you are colder than my snow man in the garden.”

“ And only see how funny you look, all speckled with snow ; why, I should think you had been turned into a snow-drift on the way ! ” said Annie laughing.

"Not quite that," I replied, shaking cloak and boa and muff, and scattering the flakes upon demure old pussy, who quickly escaped to the protection of little Nellie's apron.

"But, dear cousin, I am so glad you have come," said Helen's gentle voice, "for I was afraid you would be too late for our happy celebration this evening, for we are all going to the church, to have a service appropriate to Christmas Eve."

"Yes," interrupted Frank, "and all the Sunday school children are to be there, and to sing instead of the choir, and O, you can't think how Mr. Clinton has drilled and drilled us. And now suppose we should make a mistake, or hold our books upside down,—what say you to that, sister? But just please not shake your wise little head so solemnly to me, as if I couldn't be as dignified as the best."

"Hush, hush," said Helen, "but, cousin, you must be quick, and get nice and warm; for the bell will strike soon, and I should be so disappointed not to have you join us."

"What! and leave Grandmother all alone; that wouldn't seem quite fair," said I, seating myself on the little cricket by her side.

"Ah! but Mary dear, you know I love sometimes to be alone," she replied in gentle tones, "and strange indeed would it be, if this evening, at least, I could not have happy thoughts in remembering those so very dear to me, now at home with their Saviour; with Him whose birth-night has shed such light and peace over all the darker scenes in life. And now, children, leave cousin Mary to me for a few minutes, and go and get ready for your walk, and remember and wrap up warm."

And just then old Jane came into the room, looking the same picture of neatness and order, as twenty years before, with "best" dark gown, clean checked apron and white muslin handkerchief, crossed and pinned so very exactly,—and cordially greeting me, placed on the side-table a waiter covered with the whitest of napkins, bearing a cup of hot coffee, drop-cakes, Nellie's precious Christmas cake, and all that could possibly tempt

an appetite, which needed little tempting, after a cold ride of thirty miles in an open sleigh.

Doing full justice to these, just as the old clock struck the hour of seven, we heard the distant bell, calling us to the evening service, and then the little folks came running in, fearing we should be too late, and warmed and refreshed, we gladly started on our walk.

A happy group we were, of uncles, aunts, and cousins, the old and the young, as we wound along the village street, and ascended the steep hill, on which stood the ancient church, that had weathered the storms of more than a century. There was the pointed spire as in days gone by, and well did I remember the fearful thunder-shower, when the lightning played around it, as if sporting in its wild glee—and then the sudden crash that announced its dread descent. For many weeks it stood a blackened ruin, and when at length it was repaired, I gazed upon its towering height with a deeper reverence, for then it seemed to me to have been consecrated by the very finger of the Most High. And now the bright moon glistened

and sparkled on its snowy roof, reminding me of the golden roof of that nobler temple of old, to which a great and mighty nation went up to celebrate their solemn feasts ; and as I peered into the clear depths of the starry sky, I thought of that night, when on Judea's plains the shepherds gazed with wonder upon the opening heavens, and angel-voices chanted their glad thanksgiving over the birth of the Prince of Peace.

But now the church was reached, and beautiful was the sight that greeted the eye, as we entered its time-worn walls, showing now no traces of the ravages of time, but wreathed in evergreens and flowers, fit emblems of the happy hour. As we passed along the aisle, each pillar that supported the heavy gallery was garlanded with flowers, interspersed with appropriate mottoes. "I am the Good Shepherd." "Suffer the little children to come unto me." "Ye are my disciples if ye have love one toward another." "The Prince of Peace." "Whosoever will, let him freely come, for he that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

The altar too was festooned with beautiful wreaths, and covered with flowers, surmounted by an ever-green cross, bearing the words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life;" "One family in Heaven and on earth." And as I looked upon that speaking emblem of our faith, I thought of the many who had joined in worship within these earthly walls, now uniting in nobler songs of praise, in the felt presence of Him, through whom they had received pardon and redemption. There was the very seat where, year after year, sat my venerable Grandfather,—and in the short winter afternoons, when the setting sun shone through the western windows and rested on his silvery locks, how truly did they seem as a crown of glory! His benignant smile seemed yet to beam upon me, and when I remembered his loving spirit, his words of kindly greeting, and the respect and deference ever paid to him by every class in our community, I felt how serene and happy may be the sunset of a well spent life.

There too was the old pew, where, Sabbath after Sabbath, we sat together in the house of

worship, a little band of brothers and sisters,—now a divided household ; and just beyond, was the seat once occupied by one deeply loved, but who passed on in the gladness and beauty of early childhood, leaving only gentle memories of her loving spirit, to refresh the soul in the sterner trials of maturer years.

But my thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a sweet, soft strain of music, and then a hundred youthful voices united in that beautiful hymn :—

“ Hark ! what mean those holy voices,
Sweetly sounding through the skies ?
Lo ! the angelic host rejoices,
Heavenly hallelujahs rise.

“ Listen to the wondrous story,
Which they chant in hymns of joy :
‘ Glory in the highest—glory !
Glory be to God most high !

“ ‘ Peace on earth, good-will from heaven,
Reaching far as man is found ;
Souls redeemed and sins forgiven ;
Loud our golden harps shall sound.

“ ‘ Christ is born, the great Anointed ;
Heaven and earth his praises sing !
O receive whom God appointed,
For your Prophet, Priest, and King ! ’ ”

As the last strain died away in perfect stillness, the Pastor, so deeply loved by his little flock, arose, and in earnest tones read the account of the infant Jesus, of his humble birth at Bethlehem, when,

“ In lowliness forgotten,
A manger for his bed,
On his young mother’s bosom
The Saviour laid his head ; ”

and of the angelic song that arose on the stillness of the night, and was wafted over the hills of Judea, announcing to the watching shepherds that the Saviour, the Redeemer, was born.

Then looking thoughtfully around upon the many youthful and happy faces turned towards him, he continued in an impressive and earnest manner :—“ To commemorate that joyful night, my young friends, we have now assembled within these consecrated walls. To remember him whose life has blessed and sanctified every scene of daily duty and joy, we have here met together ; to offer up our heartfelt thanksgiving and gratitude to him through whom alone we have the glad assurance of pardon and immortality, and to commune anew

with that Saviour who has taught us alike by his life, his teachings, and his death, the true meaning of all trial and sorrow, and who now enables us with a happy faith and a cheerful trust to remember those once with us, the young and the happy, as well as the more advanced pilgrims on life's race, whose voices are indeed silent to the outward ear, but who now, in holier and more joyous strains, swell the choral song of the redeemed.

“ And shall not ours be the prayer this night,


‘ Thou star of glory, lead us,
Thou music deep and sweet ;
Lead us unto the manger,
Lead us to Jesus' feet ? ’

“ My young friends, have *you* truly come to him, and chosen him as your only guide and teacher ? Do you love him as your Saviour, and have you given your hearts to him in their early freshness and strength ? Were he on earth, would you go to him, and sit at his feet like Mary of old, and seek his divine blessing and guidance ? Why, then, come not to him *now* ? He is here this night, with each one of you, speaking to you,

pleading with you thus to come. Not afar off, in the distant heavens, does he dwell ; for he promised to *abide* with those who loved him ; and it is *his* voice that says to the youngest as well as to the oldest present, ‘ Come unto *me*, for him that *cometh* to me, I will in no wise cast out.’ More truly does he love you than any earthly parent or friend, for he left his heavenly home, and the glory which he had with the Father, to live, suffer, and die for you ; yes—for each one of you, that you might be saved from sin, and receive the forgiveness and favor of God. Delay no longer, but come to him now, and seek his presence and blessing. He is waiting to receive you—he stands with open arms to welcome you—his Spirit pleads with you. When tempted to sin,—to anger, petulance, or impatience,—see his calm, reproving eye fixed upon you ; when struggling against temptation, watch his smile of encouragement ; when discouraged, or anxious, or sorrowful, hear his words, ‘ Be of good cheer ; lo ! I am with you always ; ’ when inclined to sloth and indolence and negligence, feel the thrilling touch of the Master’s hand,


bidding you awake to action and noble exertion. Come to him as your Saviour ; look up to him trustingly and sincerely ; ask him to help and guide you, to teach you more and more of the Father, to be ever with you, and to make you his true, child-like disciples.

“ And to many among you, are there not other voices, unheard indeed by the outward ear, which whisper gently and earnestly to your inmost spirits, bidding you remember that the things which are unseen alone are real and eternal ? Cannot some of you hear the gentle tones of a loving mother’s voice, which blessed your helpless infancy, now doubly dear and sacred, and whose daily prayer it was, that you might be in early life true disciples of your Saviour ? Are there not those who are conscious of a father’s angel-blessing, and who hear yet again a father’s earnest prayer, that the divided earthly household may be once more and forever united ? And do not some among you listen in the hour of silence and solitude, or even in the busy school-hour, to a loved brother’s animating voice, or hear a gentle sister’s



words of sympathy and affection? And do not all of these voices echo and reëcho through the secret chambers of your souls, and blending in one united strain, ever say, 'Come up hither?'

"Many of you, my young friends, are anticipating with gladness the festivities of the morrow, when parents, brothers, sisters, and friends shall be reunited in the homes of their childhood. But have you thought of a more certain celebration, a larger and more joyous Christmas gathering, a more emphatic and happy welcome, in store for each and all? 'This day—this week—before the old year closes, some of you may be called to that larger reunion of friends and home. But are you making the needed preparation? Are you anticipating with glad joy that happy day? Have you ever given as many or as eager thoughts to that day certainly in store for you, as to the preparations for this evening and the morrow? Are you earnest and unwearied in preparing for your only true home,—that home where you shall see the Saviour face to face? And when called thither, will the first strain from the eternal melodies of



heaven be the glad greeting, ‘ Welcome, good and faithful servant ? ’

“ To some of you, I fear, these words seem all vague and unmeaning. Would that you might know and feel their deep reality !

“ Heaven lies before you, with all its joys, its strains of welcome, its words of invitation, its blessed voices of encouragement and hope,—heaven, with God the Father, with Christ the Saviour and Mediator, with the spirits of the just made perfect,—heaven, with its beauty and gladness and peace,—heaven, with its large home-gathering, its festal joys and happy greetings, its nobler and wider duties, its purer faith and unceasing progress.

And before you, too, lies the downward path,—the world of woe, of suffering, and of death, with all its dread retributions. Which path have *you* chosen ? Have you ever thought seriously enough to choose, solemnly and deliberately ? Can that young lad, think you, have chosen the one only true and narrow path, whose tongue so often takes the name of the most holy God in vain, whose angry lips utter the words of swearing and blas-

phemy? Can that boy, so often wilful and disobedient, unkind and petulant at home, negligent at school, and rude to his companions,—can he have chosen the one narrow path? Can that youth, who is so ambitious and self-confident, so eager for riches, distinction, and pleasure, who seldom prays, and regards the Bible with indifference and the Sabbath as a weariness,—can he, think you, have ever thought seriously of making one in the great home-gathering of the heavenly Christmas? And that bright and lively girl, so full of plans and schemes, of thoughts of dress and beauty and fashion,—has she earnestly and truly chosen for her guide Him who said, ‘Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness; take up thy cross daily, and follow me?’ Has she remembered the day when every thing outward and earthly must be laid aside, and her spirit alone and by itself must appear before the judgment-seat? And that little girl, perhaps the pet and plaything of her home, yet who is so often angry or selfish or unkind,—has she remembered that none who cherish such feelings can be admitted to that joyous festi-

val to which we are all invited, to which she may soon, very soon be called ? And that daughter, seeking only her own pleasure and gratification, negligent of home-duties, and regardless of a mother's cares and anxieties,—can she have chosen for her guide and example, Him who ‘pleased not himself,’ who came not to be ‘ministered unto, but to minister,’ and who gave his life a willing sacrifice for man ?

“Come then, once more, I would earnestly beseech you ; come with sincere and earnest hearts to Him who blesses your homes, who sanctifies this festival by his kind presence, who waits to welcome you now to his undying love, and will admit you hereafter to those nobler joys promised even to the youngest disciple. Choose this night whom ye will serve. Come to Christ, and give your hearts wholly to him. Here and now is he with you,—invisible, indeed, to the outward eye, yet it is *his* hand that is stretched forth to welcome you, *his* voice that bids you come, *his* love that pleads with you. Come, and be Christ's true and faithful disciples on earth, and in the great home-gather-

ing—the heavenly Christmas—may not one be wanting to swell the song of glad thanksgiving and gratitude, to Him over whose human birth the angel-choir rejoiced, singing, ‘Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good-will towards men!’

“To his earnest words of invitation may many of your hearts respond this night, ‘Yes, we *will* come, and give ourselves to him; henceforth he shall be *our* Saviour and guide.’

“And when the things of earth shall have passed away, may his hand unfold to you the gates of immortality, and place upon your brows the crown of life eternal. ‘And the spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.’”

A silence, deep and heartfelt, followed these words, and a hushed solemnity pervaded the entire church. Then a few sweet voices sang that hymn, ever to be associated with the gladness of the Christmas Eve :—

“ Calm on the list’ning ear of night,
Come heaven’s melodious strains,
Where wild Judea stretches far
Her silver-mantled plains.

“ Celestial choirs from courts above
Shed sacred glories there ;
And angels, with their sparkling lyres,
Make music on the air.

“ The answering hills of Palestine
Send back the glad reply ;
And greet, from all their holy heights,
The dayspring from on high.

“ O’er the blue depths of Galilee
There comes a holier calm ;
And Sharon waves, in solemn praise,
Her silent groves of palm.

“ ‘ Glory to God ! ’ the lofty strain
The realms of ether fills ;
How sweet the song of solemn joy,
O’er Judah’s sacred hills !

“ ‘ Glory to God ! ’ the sounding skies
Loud with their anthems ring ;
‘ Peace to the earth, good-will to men,
From heaven’s Eternal King ! ’

“ Light on thy hills, Jerusalem !
The Saviour now is born !
And bright on Bethlehem’s joyous plains
Breaks the first Christmas morn.”


A quiet and happy group, we again assembled in the large, old room, around the cheerful fire. Even the merry tones of the little ones were somewhat subdued in their eager whisperings of Christmas boxes and presents, as if they, too, had felt the heavenly influence of the hour ; but when I looked into Helen’s sweet and thoughtful face, I knew how deeply she had entered into its true spirit, and I felt assured that she had indeed known her Saviour’s love, and received his holy blessing.

But when in tremulous tones our dear Grandmother gave to each her parting blessing and kind “ good-night,” adding with earnest voice and manner, “ May we indeed meet an unbroken family above ; may not one be wanting on that heavenly

Christmas, when the Saviour himself shall lead us among the green pastures and beside the still waters!"—little did we think that one had even then received the summons to enter into that higher home.

Not brighter did the first Christmas morning break over "Bethlehem's joyous plains," than this greeted our eyes as we arose after peaceful and refreshing slumber. Not a cloud obscured the golden rays of the sun, which shone with unwonted brilliancy, and was reflected from the white, snow-clad earth. Every tree and shrub, and even the little twigs of the honeysuckle and sweet-briar, that twined around the porch, were cased in their clear, transparent covering of ice, while the noble elm that waved in graceful beauty before the door, seemed literally robed in diamonds and pearls, sparkling so brightly in its rich and gorgeous beauty.

The Father's smile, indeed, shone around us; but did it beam less brightly in that darkened chamber, where lay the suffering child, hopefully and patiently awaiting the last summons that would



forever release her from suffering and sin,—calmly expecting that heavenly messenger, who came to lead her with a gentle hand “into the land of the great departed?” Suddenly stricken, our dearly-loved Helen was passing from the earthly to the heavenly home,—from communion with her Father and Saviour here, to their more consciously felt presence in heaven.

Much as we had loved her gentle, sweet, and unselfish spirit, the thought had hardly occurred to us, that so soon faith to her would be lost in sight, and hope in glad reality. For several weeks she had seemed, if possible, more loving and thoughtful than ever, and though the shortened breath and the rapid pulse might have betrayed to the careful eye the insidious working of some fatal disease, the cheerful voice, the happy smile, the constant thoughtfulness for others, the ready sympathy in others’ joys and interests, at once chased the anxious thought and inquiry from even the mother’s watchful spirit. But the sudden and severe cold of the previous evening had proved too great for her delicate frame : and now with throb-

bing brow and feverish pulse, but with a childlike, Christian trust, she turned from those so dear and loved on earth, to pass to that eternal home whose light had ever blessed her earthly pathway.

“ Good-bye, dear Frank ; be a good boy ; and O, do not forget last evening,—our *last* Christmas Eve together ; love Jesus, and be *his* disciple. And, Lizzie, too, and darling Nell ; remember that I shall wait for you. Annie, we shall soon all meet. Mother, dear mother ! one kiss more ; do not weep ; O, how happy will be that heavenly Christmas, when there shall be no more parting ! Cousin Mary, lay your hand on my head ; here—it throbs so ! Hark ! do you not hear that soft, sweet music ? it comes nearer and nearer. Father ! Jesus calls me. I see him now ; he bids me come ; he smiles upon me. I go ! ” And suddenly starting up and stretching forth her hands, she exclaimed, “ How beautiful ! ” then gently sank in quiet slumber.

“ The room seemed full of angels
When we laid her on her bed ;
We gathered round with tears and smiles,
We could not call her dead.”


She had indeed gone *Home*, and hers was a joyous Christmas with the children of heaven. Loving and trusting her Saviour on earth, she passed without fear to his immediate presence. And when we gathered the sweet flowers she had watched and loved, and twined them around her peaceful brow and placed them in her clasped hands, and gazed on the sweet smile that lingered on her happy countenance, as if she still heard the heavenly and joyful strains that welcomed her home, we felt as never before the power of those divine words, "Those who seek me *early* shall find me."

PART II.

“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!”

CHRISTMAS EVE.

TWO years had swiftly passed, and again the clear bright light of the Christmas Eve fell softly upon the snow-clad earth, while a holier calm seemed to be borne upon each passing breeze, as if wafting to the dwellings of man the promised blessing announced by the choir of heavenly voices, "Peace on earth, good-will to man." Twice had the spring flowers bloomed and faded on Helen's grave, and twice had the crimson leaves of autumn silently fallen over her quiet resting-place, mingling their gorgeous hues with the rich, long grass that waved in wild luxuriance around, while the last rays of the brilliant autumn sunsets, played in quiet gladness over a spot hallowed to the eye of affection, as if they loved to linger about one so gentle and pure.



Another and a smaller mound now rested beneath the bending boughs of the dark, green pine ; and once the early violets had bloomed, and autumn wreaths, woven by loving hands, had been tenderly placed upon the sleeping place of little Mary, the pet of the household, whose loving lips had just learned to lisp the endearing name of "Mother," when she, too, was gently taken to the arms of the Good Shepherd.

But the noble elm still waved in beauty before the old mansion, and the pendant icicles glittered as before in the clear moonlight, while the cheerful fires blazed brightly in the old-fashioned rooms, around which the little group of uncles, aunts, and cousins were again assembled. A shade of deeper thought rested upon Frank's open, manly countenance, while the tear that started to Annie's eye, as little Nell carelessly hummed a tune, once a favorite of Helen's, showed that time had not weakened the bond that still united the sisters in tender affection.

"But now for your promised story, Cousin Mary," exclaimed George,—“just the right time

for it, with the moonlight streaming so softly through the room, and lying in golden bands across the floor."


"Yes! do!" entreated Nell, as she sprang into her father's arms, "do tell us a real, true story,—it will be so pleasant!"

"Please, do!" said Annie, as she pressed more closely to her mother's side, and looked fondly into her face, as if she knew full well that *her* thoughts were busy with past scenes.

"Well said," said Frank, "but I move that all the evening's entertainment shall not fall upon the shoulders of one poor cousin,—for if we have no Christmas tree, we can, at least, by stories or singing, contribute to the happiness of the hour."

"I second the motion, my boy," exclaimed uncle John, "so let us begin."

"Grandmother first," said little Nell,—and in answer to the pleading voice she could rarely resist, grandmother took off her spectacles, placed her knitting aside, and in the clear, full tones, that had always been the delight of her children, sang a favorite hymn.



" When, marshalled on the nightly plain,
The glittering host bestud the sky,
One star alone, of all the train,
Can fix the sinner's wandering eye.

" Hark, hark ! to God, the chorus breaks,
From every host, from every gem ;
But one alone the Saviour speaks,—
It is the Star of Bethlehem.

" Once on the raging seas I rode ;
The storm was loud, the night was dark ;
The ocean yawn'd, and rudely blow'd
The wind that tossed my foundering bark.

" Deep horror then my vitals froze ;
Death-struck, I ceased the tide to stem ;
When suddenly a star arose,—
It was the Star of Bethlehem.

" It was my guide, my light, my all ;
It bade my dark forebodings cease ;
And through the storm and danger's thrall,
It led me to the port of peace.

" Now, safely moored, my perils o'er,
I'll sing, first in night's diadem,
Forever and forever more,—
The Star, the Star of Bethlehem."


That holy star of peace,—softly it beamed upon
the little group, and pointed onward to that world
where there shall be no night and no parting.

Then Annie took up the strain, while Frank accompanied her on his flute, and she softly sang a Christmas carol. And as the last notes died away, a hushed stillness pervaded the room, until her Father said,—“Let us indeed echo those strains, and so carry in our hearts the holy song of the angels, that Christ shall abide with us, not this night only, but through life, until we all unite our voices with the glad anthem of the Redeemed.

But his words were suddenly interrupted by a chorus of youthful voices just beneath the window, where, in the bright moonlight, a band of children had assembled from the village, to greet their kind friends, singing,

“Oh! Christmas is coming! the bright, joyful day,
That driveth all sorrow and trouble away;
Glad greetings we bring to true friends, young and old,
For Christmas is coming! *his* heart is ne’er cold!”

The hall door was quickly thrown open, and a happy group entered, full of glee, exclaiming, “Merry Christmas! merry Christmas!” And cakes were brought out, and games were played, and joyful voices echoed through the hall, and the



gladness was complete, when Cousin Mary produced from a well-filled box, the tokens of affection wrought by loving hands, to render the season one of true comfort, as well as of joy to the little ones. Even little orphan Jennie, forgot her usual quiet, sad demeanor, and danced around right merrily with her new hood and warm mittens, "and a real picture-book for my own, too ;" she exclaimed.

"And O, how glad Mother will be of this warm shawl, and a new blanket!" said the self-forgetting Lizzie, as the vision of their neat, but scantily furnished room, came before her.

"And here's a dictionary, and a pair of skates, too ;" shouted William. "No begging or borrowing, now !"

"That's because you were so punctual and attentive at school, I rather guess," said Frank, in a sly tone,—having found William no mean competitor in his class, notwithstanding coarse clothes and hard fare.

"And I've found a Bible," said Ellen, "and now I can learn my Sunday lessons, and have it

to read every day,—shan't I, Miss Mary? And shan't I take my new shoes to poor Anne, who wants so much to come into your class, but she has no way of getting any, her father drinks so, and her mother works so hard to get the children bread?"

"Yes, Ellen, and take this dress too, and bring her to see me to-morrow, when she shall have a good Christmas dinner for once, and enough, too, to carry home."

"Good! good!" exclaimed Ellen, "and I'm sure we never shall forget *this* Christmas Eve."

"No, indeed!" shouted all, and joining hands, they danced around the old hall festooned with evergreens, and singing the merry chorus,—

"Christmas joys be with you,
Christmas hopes now cheer you,
Christmas blessings keep you,—"

they sped out into the clear moonlight, cracking the hard crusted snow beneath their feet, breaking off the icicles that hung from every bush and tree and fringed the old fences with glittering pearls and diamonds, and hurrying on, down the steep

hill, and across the smooth, firm ice of the pond, covered with merry skaters, till their voices were lost in the distance.

“And now, cousin Mary, for your story,” said Frank, as he threw a fresh pine knot on the fire, while

“Swift little troops of silent sparks,
Now pausing, now scattering away in fear,
Went, threading the soot-forest's tangled darks,
Like herds of startled deer.”

“Your story now, if it isn't your turn, or the lamps will be lighted, and that will spoil all the beauty of it.”

“Well, well; give me the little cricket, and a seat by the side of the old hearth, and then I shall imagine myself a little girl again; and I will read you, by the flickering light, a little tale my mother gave me many years ago, one Christmas Eve, when, after a severe illness, I had so far recovered as to be allowed to read, though too feeble to engage in the active sports of my sisters and playmates. I only hope it will afford you somewhat of the pleasure it gave me, when I first

drew it from its bright inclosure of green morocco. And here it is, just as I had it then. But don't expect a very gay or merry story, or you will be disappointed."

"I am in no very gay mood, just at present," said Frank, "and so it will suit me, I know."

"And I am sure I shall like any of cousin Mary's stories," said Annie.

"Well! well! criticisms and praises at the end," said uncle John, "so pray begin."

"But what is the name of it?" asked Nell.

"No matter for names," said George, "do begin."

"Well! as I really know no better name," answered cousin Mary, "I will call it


"THE VILLAGE CHURCH, OR THE HEAVENLY GIFT.

"One bright, summer Sabbath, I passed the early hours of the morning at the house of a friend, adjoining a beautiful village, which overlooks the banks of the Connecticut. The situation had evidently been selected on account of its rich and varied beauty, while the hand of taste had con-

tributed not a little 'to increase the natural loveliness of the scene. No sound was to be heard,—none, save the music of the birds, carolling their morning hymn of praise ; and as I seated myself beneath the broad shade of a noble elm, whose spreading branches waved in the fresh morning breeze, and scattered the early dew like pearls beneath them, I thought that I had never gazed upon a scene more rich in its varied and quiet loveliness. Around me were the dark, pine forests, those 'great temples of nature,' filled with glory, wonder, and beauty,—beneath, the early mist was rolling in dark and heavy clouds over the valley, assuming every diversity of shape, and revealing here and there, as it lifted its shadowy veil, the bright and sparkling waters of the river, flowing on in their calm, majestic splendor. The fertile valleys, tinged with every variety of green, and rejoicing in all the rich luxuriance of summer, were bright with the first tints of the early morning, while far in the distance, the outlines of the Green Mountains could just be discerned beneath the blue mist, which still rested over them like a

cloud. Dew-drops were sparkling on every leaf and blade of grass,—white, fleecy clouds flitted across the sky, their shadows dancing up and down the green hill-sides, while the air was filled with the humming of insects, rejoicing in their brief life, and uniting their humble praise with that of all nature around them. Earth, air, and sky were instinct with glorious and beautiful life, and as my spirit drank in the perfect harmony of the scene and hour, I thought how fitting it was for the soul to bow down and worship in this great cathedral of Nature, ere entering the earthly sanctuary of praise and prayer.

“ But the striking of the village bell, echoing through the quiet valley, aroused me from my meditations, and returning to the winding road, I followed the scattered groups wending their way to the village church. There was nothing showy in the simple structure, but as it stood there so quietly, embosomed in the green foliage, with its graceful spire pointing to the sky, while the clear waters of the river, still fresh and full as in spring, sparkled in the bright sunlight,—emblem



of those living waters, of which he who drinketh shall never thirst,—I thought it seemed far more truly a hallowed spot, meet for Christian worship, than the richer and more elaborate structures of the crowded city.

“ Following a group of little girls, who, with books in their hands, were conversing of their Sabbath-school lesson, I heard one of them say,—‘ Well, I intend to receive a box *to-day*; the past week has been nothing but dissatisfaction, and every thing seems to have gone wrong, because I wouldn’t even *ask* for one last Sunday,—I was so thoughtless !’

“ ‘ And I hope to have one, too, a real treasure !’ said another.

“ ‘ And so do I,’ said a third.

“ ‘ And don’t you expect to have one, too, Amy ?’ said an older voice at their side, addressing a little girl about twelve years of age, who walked somewhat apart from the rest, and took no share in their eager conversation. The pale countenance turned towards me, interested me at once, by the subdued, sad expression, always so touching in childhood,—as she replied, ‘ Yes, Miss Morton, I

hope I shall receive one, though I am sure I don't deserve it,—but it will make the sorrow so much easier to bear all the week. Do you think the one I most need will indeed be given to me ?'


" 'He that asketh receiveth, dear Amy. Only ask, in humble confidence, and it will be yours.'

" 'But mother is very, very ill,' said the child, 'and the children are to be cared for, and Jessie is so restless that I get angry without thinking, and speak unkindly, and then I am so sorry ; and oh, what shall I do, if mother is taken too, for we've no father now !'—and the tears flowed freely over the care-worn face.

" 'You have a Father in Heaven, dear Amy. Go to Him for all you need, tell Him all your griefs, and the burden will be lightened.'

" 'So I do, Miss Morton ; but sometimes I feel as if He didn't hear me, when so many troubles come, and then I feel so weary ; I feel and do wrong so often ;—I am so unlike Jesus !'—she added in a hesitating voice.

" 'But you *wish* to be like Him, Amy, and you are striving ; and are not these his own loving



words,—“Come unto me, for he that *cometh* I will in nowise cast out?” “Cast *all* your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” Look up, dear Amy; the cloud has now hidden from us the full, bright rays of the sun, but it is shining still, though *we* are walking in the shade. The dark cloud brings the refreshing shower,—not the bright and golden.’

“‘Oh, Miss Morton, if I had but your faith!’

“‘Seek, and ye shall find. No sincere seeker has ever yet been baffled. He who has sent sickness and trial, will give all needed strength and help, even to such a frail and timid disciple as you; for, Amy, with your earnest longing to be the Saviour’s, and to consecrate to Him your early youth, do you believe that He would turn away from you? Will you trust *His* divine *promise* less than my simple word? First the Cross,—then the Crown. First the sorrow, the trial, the earnest struggle against sin, the choice of Christ as your Saviour and Guide,—then the clear sunlight of faith and love. And ask, dear Amy, ask for these precious treasures to-day to be distrib-



uted, which you may take with you to your home, and which will so help you the coming week, and I know they will be given.'

"But the crowd of persons assembled around the steps of the church we had now reached, separated me from the little group I had watched with so much interest, and so, quietly and alone I entered the sanctuary, and took my seat. The summer sun streamed through the open windows, shaded in part by the bending boughs of the noble old elms, through which the golden light flickered and played; and then were heard the solemn tones of the organ, and the voice of music, so moving always, so thrilling when the voice of praise; and as I listened to the sweet melody, for a moment I felt as if indeed 'Heaven's gates were open, and the world's were shut.'

"But as the clear, full strain died away, and I lifted up my head, attracted by the entrance of many who had remained around the porch until the commencement of the regular service, I was struck by the strange sight which presented itself to my view, but which seemed so familiar to those

present, as to be unregarded by the majority of the worshippers.

“ Opposite the entrance to the church, behind the pulpit, was a large, clear, polished mirror, reflecting the form of each person as he entered ; but unlike any mirrors I had ever before seen, possessing this peculiar quality,—that not the outward, but the inward was there reflected,—the image of the thoughts, feelings, purposes,—the whole character of each individual, without regard to any thing external, such as wealth, position, dress, fame, popularity, or fashion. The real man, woman, or child was here to be seen, stripped of all outward badges of distinction. And as one and another entered, and took their seats, some without even casting a glance at the mirror, strange were the transformations to be discerned. First came a lady, richly and fashionably dressed, with features of rare beauty, and a quiet, composed expression of countenance ; but I felt at the first glance that there was something wanting ; and as I looked into the mirror, the rich and gorgeous drapery fell aside, and want and inward destitution and restless am-

bition were written on those faultless features,—and the spirit of worldliness and the love of earthly pleasures had so overshadowed each nobler thought and aspiration, that the Angel of Love turned sadly away, as if his mission to her soul on this holy day were fruitless.

“Then a little girl, bright and beautiful, took her seat beside me, with the air of one who had been taught, at least, to reverence the Sanctuary ; but as I looked into the truth-telling mirror, the heart was filled with vain thoughts, and the love of dress, and the anxious surmise whether others were observing her new bonnet ; but there was no inward worship, no desire to pray in spirit and in truth.

“Then came a noble youth, with talent and intellect written on his open brow ; but the faithful reflection showed the knee bent to the worship of self—not God.

“Following him, was one in the prime of life, of high repute among men, but his idol was money, and mammon-worship claimed the heart, whose service cannot be divided. And there was one in

opening womanhood, with grace and gentleness inscribed on features of no ordinary beauty ; but sad it was to behold the inner life as it came to view, with its wandering, vapid aims, its love of flattery, its vain desires and aimless purposes ;—and again the guardian angel of her soul folded his wings in sadness, as the new opportunity for repentance and holy consecration was offered, through the quickening and sacred influences of the Sabbath, and again so carelessly rejected.

“ But all the revelations were not of this character ; and strange, very strange was it, to turn from the church, bright in the clear, summer sunlight, to the image of the assembled worshippers in this wonderful mirror. Truly, thought I, ‘ Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.’

“ There was one, plain in feature and somewhat repulsive in aspect, but whose image was radiant with the holy light of self-sacrifice and love ; and another, bending beneath the weight of years, whose reflection showed the immortal power of faith, and calm endurance, and a cheerful trust.

There was the young mother, too, with the peaceful light of heaven illumining the pale and wasted features; and there, too, was the father laboring to be faithful to his holy stewardship, as priest unto God, in his own little circle, already clothed as with the garments of righteousness.

“And there were children over whom the guardian angels watched with tender care, turning aside all that might darken or defile their souls, answering their secret questionings with words of divine wisdom, and pointing them ever to Christ, as the guide and keeper of every young and trusting heart.

“A bowed and stricken form passed me, as of one bending beneath the weight of some great sorrow; but as I looked within the mirror, there were the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and the crown of faith rested on the weary brow; while another, suffering from the chronic pains of many years, enabled to reach the house of prayer only by the helping hands of loving friends, possessed that inward peace, that peace of God, which passeth understanding and utterance.

“ Truly, here the outward was seen to be but the shadow ; the inward, the only reality.

“ As I thought of these things, a veil was suddenly drawn over the mirror, and the sacred hymn pealed in full chorus from the united voices of the whole congregation,—

“ When before thy throne we kneel,
Filled with awe and holy fear,
Teach us, O our God ! to feel
All thy sacred presence near.

“ Check each proud and wandering thought,
When on thy great name we call ;
Man is naught, is less than naught ;
Thou, our God, art all in all.”

“ The regular services of the day then proceeded, but my mind was so occupied with the thoughts suggested by the mirror, that I fear the words of the preacher were almost lost upon me, albeit his subject was peculiarly appropriate to what I had witnessed ;—‘ The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.’ Then followed earnest supplications for forgiveness and strength ; and the sorrowful Amy was

not forgotten by me, as the prayer was offered, that all in trial and grief might be purified through the ministry of sorrow, and thus brought into closer communion with the Redeemer.

“ And then the benediction was pronounced, and many hastily left the church, as if the simple rites of worship had been too long ; but some quietly lingered, and catching a glimpse of Amy’s earnest face, in a distant corner, and seeing the eager glance of her dark, speaking eye, directed towards the altar, I turned around, and as I looked, an Angel with a countenance radiant with celestial beauty and love, passed slowly up the aisle, and stood silently beside the altar. A calm repose dwelt upon his features, and yet there was a half-concealed expression of sadness, mingled with their inexpressible sweetness and gentleness.

“ In his hand he carried a box filled with the most precious stones and jewels, glowing with a light such as we imagine shines from the heaven-built walls and pearly gates of the New Jerusalem,—and as he placed it upon the altar, a strain of music floated through the church, so soft, so ethe-

real, that every breath was hushed, and every motion stilled, as in silent expectation.

“Then looking round upon the assembly, his searching glance passing from countenance to countenance, as if it could read the deepest secrets of the heart, he said, in tones of gentle, persuasive earnestness,—‘These are sent by my Heavenly Master as pledges of his love, as helps in the path of duty, as encouragements under trial and sorrow, as safeguards against temptation, to all who sincerely desire the proffered blessing, to all who come hither this morning with earnest purposes, and the heartfelt desire to draw nearer to their Saviour, and to have his spirit abide with and in them. Let all, who in heart desire these treasures, approach.’

“With eager gaze I watched the crowd around me, and to my astonishment and grief, many left the house without even seeking a share of the riches displayed to them,—jewels, whose brightness dimmed the purest of earthly treasures. Some drew near, and with eager hands sought the glistening prize ; but the faithful mirror had

imaged their hearts as filled with pride, and self-sufficiency, and the love of human praise, and, at their approach, the bright lustre became dim and changed, and a sad and mournful expression rested on the Angel's countenance, as he withheld from them the rich treasures of his casket. But others as they drew near seemed to reflect the calm beauty of the celestial visitant, and when, with joyful mien, he gave them of his shining stores, a holier serenity beamed from his eye, as with solemn words he bade them cherish the gifts as tokens of their Master's love and presence with them, as pledges of earnestness in duty, and new incentives to the consecration of heart and life.


“The jewels of love and truth, charity and humility, of hope and peace and heavenly strength, were there ; but brighter, purer, more radiant than all, shone those of Faith. There were many of these in the angel's keeping, and even the little children who approached trustingly and earnestly, received the precious gems.

“While I wondered at their abundance, I looked again, and upon the golden coronet encircling the

brow of the Angel, I saw inscribed the words, 'Ask, and it shall be given;'—and then I knew him as the Angel of Faith, and my astonishment was changed to a holy joy, that to all was freely offered this best and most precious of gifts,—that the only condition of receiving was the sincere, longing, heart-felt *desire*, and the *asking* with the willingness that the gift might be bestowed in God's own time and way.

“ Oh, I thought, if all would only have looked upon these priceless treasures, and once seen their radiant light, and felt their quickening power, they could not have turned so carelessly away, from the full, free offer made to them !

“ Then the little group which I had met before entering the church, and in which I felt a lively interest, approached, and truly did I rejoice to see that the Angel kindly welcomed them, and gave to each a precious casket. But when the timid, sorrowing Amy drew near, a sweeter smile than even before played over his countenance, and as he placed within her eager grasp a beautiful casket, I observed, conspicuous above the others, the jewel



of Faith, shining with dazzling beauty. Then, with gentle hand he touched her brow, and an expression of pure and holy trust rested on her young and thoughtful countenance, as he said, ‘Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath saved thee ;—go in peace.’

“How much brighter beamed the dark eye, and how much more peaceful was the anxious heart, as Amy returned to her sad home! for the light of her precious jewel shone around the sick bed, and lighted the pillow of the dying, and pointed onward through the portals of the grave, to that heavenly city, where

‘There is no sorrow, nor any sighing,
Nor any sinning, nor any dying.’

“One by one the caskets were distributed. A holy silence reigned throughout the little church, when, calmly spreading forth his hands in blessing, the Angel slowly departed from view, while sounds of heavenly music again burst upon the ear, and celestial voices echoed his parting words, ‘He that overcometh shall inherit all things. Behold,

I come quickly ; hold that fast which thou hast,
that no man take thy crown.' ”

* * * * *

“ Is that all ? ” said Annie, in an earnest tone.

“ Yes,—all,” replied cousin Mary, as the bright light of the pine knot suddenly flickered and faded.

“ But what became of Amy,” asked Frank ;
“ don't you know any thing more about her ? ”

“ Yes ;—she became in after years a very dear friend of mine ; and though younger than myself, I have always looked to her for help and guidance, so brightly has she kept her treasured casket. Her mother was taken to her higher home, while Amy was still young ; and though left an orphan with the care of younger brothers and sisters, though called to many and severe trials, her faith and trust have rarely faltered, for she early learned to see in them all her Father's guiding hand, kindly leading her to himself. Often has she said to me, in moments of suffering and anxiety,

‘ Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before ;’

and trusting her Saviour's faithful guidance, she



has found her most treasured jewel ever growing clearer and brighter. Even now, I seem to hear her sweet, musical voice singing those beautiful lines,

‘ So long thy power hath blessed me, surely still
 ’Twill lead me on,
Through fear and doubt, through pain and sorrow, till
 The night is gone,
And with the morn, those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.’ ”

“ God be praised for that joyous hope ! ” said Grandmother’s earnest voice, “ and whether our earthly day fade amid smiles or tears, may the dawn of the heavenly morning shine on an unbroken circle, forever at Home ! ”

* * * * *

“ Cousin Mary,” said Annie, when they were seated alone together, in the clear, bright moonlight, “ I do wish I had one of those caskets you told us about, this evening, especially that bright jewel of Faith. I do long for it, but sometimes I feel as if I never should obtain it ; and I am sure if you had seen *my* image in that mirror, you would have found it deformed enough.”

"But, Annie, are you sure that you really wish for such a treasure; that you are willing to toil, and strive, and pray for it?"

"Helen possessed it," said Annie, in a low tone, "and I am not really happy without it, though I may seem so to others."

"And have you asked for it, every day, as earnestly as you would ask for daily bread if you had none? Only ask, dear Annie, ask earnestly, and you shall receive."


"But it seems too great a good, that one so young should really be called a disciple of Jesus. I am too weak and sinful."

"Would He bid you go away from him, were he now audibly to speak to you,—or would he not rather say, 'Come; come closer and nearer to me, and place your hand in mine, and let me lead and guide you?' He cares for the youngest of his little flock, and not one longing desire is unnoticed by him. The jewel may be yours, even now, dear Annie; and though its brightness may sometimes be dimmed by the clouds of earth,—though you will have to watch, and guard, and cherish it with the

greatest of care,—let it indeed be your most cherished possession ; for it is far, far more glorious than talent, or power, or beauty ;—its lustre never fades, for it is, indeed, the gift of Heaven.”

“ But how am I to obtain it, and really possess and keep it ? ”

“ By prayer, dear Annie, by earnest, sincere prayer. I know no other way. Cherish the true longing and desire to receive it, and then daily, hourly, ‘ Ask, and ye shall receive.’ Be not discouraged if you do not gain at once all you desire. Sometimes God withholds the immediate answer to our petitions, to test our sincerity and earnestness. But be assured the answer *will* come, and be willing that God should send it when and how He pleases. Trust His sure word of promise,—‘ Seek, and ye *shall* find.’ Think of Him, who, on a night like this, came into this world, amid so much sorrow and trial, and suffered and died that you might live, and live forever ; and can you doubt his willingness to help you, to receive you, to purify you from all sin, if you truly wish, and desire, and pray to be his ? Let this



holy night, dear Annie, witness your self-consecration to his service. Give yourself wholly to him. Pray that his Spirit may dwell in you. Look up to him, trustingly, and do not feel that you have a long and weary way to go, before you can come to him. Come now, and let this hallowed season be indeed blessed to you, by having it said, 'To *you*, this night, is born a Saviour.' So shall the Star of Bethlehem rise and shine upon you, guiding you through every changing scene of earth, to the heavenly mansions, and the glad Christmas gatherings of our eternal Home."

CHRISTMAS DAY.

“ Unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”

6

CHRISTMAS DAY.

THE short, winter afternoon drew near its close, and the streets of the city were thronged with an eager, busy multitude, all hastening on their different ways, as if there were yet much for them to accomplish, ere the last rays of the setting sun should quite disappear, and darkness compel them to seek their various homes, or places of evening resort. Groups of children hurried to and fro, laden with bundles and boxes, as if there were some matter of special interest in anticipation ; express wagons were unusually laden ; toy shops presented a most tempting display to youthful eyes, and too often, alas ! to empty purses ; music stores displayed their choicest selection of melodies ; the windows of the grocers were filled with oranges, figs, nuts, pears, grapes, and


every thing that could tempt the eye or the appetite of the passer by. The feeble old woman who had stood all day at the public corner behind her little stall, selling now and then an apple or a cake of gingerbread to some hungry school-boy, now drew her faded cloak closer around her, and gathering up her fruits and cakes, prepared to return to her small, dark room, where her little crippled grandchild patiently awaited her arrival.

The windows of the book-stores were filled with volumes of every size and binding, from the bright-colored picture-book for the youngest pet of the household, to the rich and chaste volumes suitable as choice gifts for grandmother or aunt, on the approaching Christmas.

But amid all the rich displays of toys and confectionery, of silks and of laces, of books and of pictures, which filled the windows of every shop, and attracted many a longing eye, there was one, around which a dense and constantly changing group was gathered, where old and young, rich and poor, paused alike, to look and to admire. It was a large window, just at the corner of a public

street, filled with vases, festoons, and bouquets of the richest and most fragrant flowers,—doubly attractive in contrast with the keen, cold wind, and leafless trees without. There were the pure white lily, the fragrant heliotrope, the scarlet ver-bena, the queenly rose, the graceful snow-drop, the delicate heath, blending their hues in simple harmony, and in their quiet, holy mission, uttering lessons of trust, and love, and gentleness ; whispering of summer airs and cloudless skies, and filling many a sad and weary heart with hope and strength.

Many went into the shop, and procured large and fragrant bouquets, to grace some festive occasion on the morrow, while others were satisfied with only the simple wreath of evergreen, emblem of the Christian's deathless hope. At length, as the crowd increased, and the twilight was fast deepening into the evening darkness, a group of young girls, full of merriment, hastened by, when, finding some difficulty in crossing the corner, one exclaimed, " O Lizzie, just look at these flowers ! let us go in and get a bunch for Miss Mary ;



she ought to have some for Christmas, I am sure, if any one ! ”

“ Well, I agree ! only don’t call her *Miss* Mary any more,—it sounds so formal ; do call her ‘cousin Mary,’ as she has asked you, and as we all do.”


“ So I will, if you and Annie will only come in and help me choose,” replied Edith, as she sprang into the shop, “ for we have no time to spare.”

“ O, this must be for dear cousin Mary,” said Lizzio, selecting a vase filled with rare camellias.

“ No ! ” said Edith, “ here’s the one ; geraniums and verbenas, pinks and roses, and so gracefully arranged, with this heath, giving to it such a light, feathery appearance.”

“ Nay, nay, girls ! I have the one ; this basket of evergreens and mosses, filled with these bright scarlet berries ; it will remind her of the country home she loves so well,—for you remember the wreath she has treasured so long, which we twined together that last Christmas in the dear old home.”

“ Well, you are right, Annie, as you always are,—the basket we’ll have. And now take it



carefully. But how we are to get through this crowd without breaking basket and all, is more than I can tell," said Edith, as she began to edge her way round the corner, to seek a less frequented street.

Just as she spoke, a sweet, childish voice attracted Annie's attention.

"Do give me *one* flower, one single flower, to carry home!"

"And pray, what do *you* want of flowers?" said a rough voice at her side; "you had better beg for bread, I'm thinking, than for flowers."

"But one, just one;" she pleaded,—"*one* single daisy or a bit of green!"

"And what will you do with it?" said Annie, who had caught sight of the beseeching, sad little face, and whose loving heart could not resist the appeal.

"O, I want one for sister Alice, just one,—for may be it will make her better, and she is *so* ill,—she can't speak to me now;" and the pale lips quivered with a sorrow long suppressed.

"And has she been sick long?"

"All summer she was sick, and every week she grew weaker, and the doctor said if she could only go out into the fields, and run about, instead of sewing all day in our little room where we never see the sun, she might get better,—but we had nothing to eat but what she earned for us, and so she kept on sewing and sewing, even after she could sit up no longer ;—and now she coughs all the time, and I want one flower, just one, for her."

"And that you shall have, and more too," said Annie, as, returning to the shop, she took her last treasured half-dollar from her purse, and selecting a fragrant bunch of the freshest looking flowers, placed them in the child's hand, and bade her run home quickly, for it was almost dark.

The child fixed one earnest look on Annie's open, gentle face, then darting through the crowd, was gone in an instant.

"Blessings on the young miss!" said one in the crowd who had observed the act,—“she'll never want for friends,—of that I'm sure.”

"Foolish!" exclaimed another, "is every beggar child to be treated in that style, I wonder!"

Meanwhile Annie had gained the opposite side of the street, when Edith joining her, said in no very gentle tone, "Well, Annie! so your half dollar has gone,—pray how do you intend to furnish your Christmas box for to-morrow? You know you needed some silk, and gilt paper, and blue trimmings, to complete it,—and now what shall you do?"

"Do without them," replied Annie, quietly; "nobody will suffer for the loss."

"But it will look so mean; all the class intend to give our teacher something, and they know that you can afford to give a handsomer present than almost any of the others."

"Let them know it!" replied Annie, "it will do me no harm; and I am sure cousin Mary does not need a present to assure her of my love, gladly as I would bestow upon her the choicest of gifts."

"Why then did you give that child the last of your spending money, and for what she didn't really need either,—when you might have finished your beautiful box this evening?"

"Edith! Edith! if ever a child spoke the truth,

I know that little one did, just now. These flowers will make her happier than you imagine, and I can easily wait to complete my mere fancy work."

"You are a strange girl, Annie! I always said so."

"Strange am I?" said Annie, with a smile; "because I give a few flowers to a poor little girl, for her sick sister!"

"No, not that," replied Edith, "but you are always thinking of other people, and I don't see what makes you so happy, for half the time I'm so tired of school, and books, and music,—and then I get weary and dissatisfied,—and you never seem to feel so."

A half-conscious smile flitted across Annie's face, as she thought of those holy words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me;"—but she only said, "Cousin Mary's motto is, '*Forget self, and live for others*,' and there is surely no happier being on earth than she is."

Edith walked on silently. A chord had been

touched that vibrated harshly within, and the discordant notes could not at once be stilled. "How is it," she thought, "that I am never with Annie, even for a single half-hour, without feeling how far superior she is to me? And yet I stand above her at school, in all my lessons. I have twice the money at my disposal which she has, and yet she always has something to spare for others, while I hardly make mine suffice for necessary ribbons and trimmings. And more than all, she seems so cheerful and happy. She has none of those enthusiastic friendships which some girls profess, but one always knows where to find her,—and she is loved at school as much as at home. I wonder why it is so different with me?"

But Lizzie's merry laugh interrupted her reverie, as she exclaimed, "Why, Edith! in such a brown study again, that you don't even know when or where to say good night? And here we are at home, with bundles enough to furnish a shop, and business enough to keep us awake all night! Come, run in, and stay with us,—do, and for once let compositions write themselves."

Edith was on the point of yielding, when the vision of the approaching school-examination came before her, and with it the strong, old ambition, to excel all others, at whatever sacrifice of time or health, and she replied, somewhat harshly, "If your compositions can write themselves, I have no such wonderful aid, so good-night! Work away at your bundles of flannel and cotton, if you will! I have other employment for the present."

"Poor Edith! I wish she were happier," said Annie, as she and Lizzie busied themselves in preparing many a pleasant surprise for the coming day. Good, substantial gifts they were, and many an humble room, and otherwise desolate home, were cheered by their timely aid, and kind words of sympathy and love.

Meantime Edith passed on to her more stately home, and, hastily entering, heeded not her little brother's shouts of delight in exhibiting some new toys, nor her mother's gentle call, that she would participate in the children's sports for a few minutes; but going to her room, she threw aside her cloak, and taking pen and paper, commenced the

long thought-of composition. The evening hours sped on, but she could not satisfy herself. Neither ideas nor words would come at her command; and at length, wearied and disheartened, she threw aside her pen, laid her head upon the table, and freely gave way to tears.

“And what do I gain by all my endeavors?” she thought. “Nobody really cares for me. I am unhappy, and I know I am not what I ought to be. How can I be different?” “Forget self,” whispered Conscience. “Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” uttered a yet deeper voice within, in tones that thrilled through her inmost soul.

The various scenes and events of the past year came unbidden before her, and for almost the first time in her life, she saw her character in its true light. She saw how every thing high, and true, and holy, had been sacrificed to the eager ambition to excel others, and how the love of self, and thoughts of dress, and fashion, and pleasure, had filled those quiet hours which should have been consecrated to God, to Christ, and to heaven.

"Would that I were different!" again and again she said to herself; but she had too long neglected self-examination and prayer,—a consciousness of real, inward want was too new to her, for her at once to seek and find the aid and relief she needed. A vague sense of deficiency, a restless yearning, a feeling of utter self-dissatisfaction filled her soul, and weary and disheartened, she sought to forget all in sleep,—but in vain. Conscience, so long resisted, now uttered its voice too loudly to be stilled amid the hushed silence of midnight, and the Christmas morning dawned upon her sleepless eyes. She opened her Bible, as was her custom, but its words of comfort and hope, announcing the Redeemer's birth, fell lifeless upon her heart; and after a vain attempt to shake off the weight upon her mind, she determined to seek once more cousin Mary, her faithful friend and teacher.

The keen, cold wind was unheeded, as she hastened on her way, and turning into the quiet little court, she had so often gayly entered, she soon found herself in the cheerful, pleasant room, where

cousin Mary usually passed the morning hours, engaged with work, pen, or books.

“ A happy Christmas ! Edith,” said a pleasant, cheerful voice, “ and a happy Christmas to all the little ones at home ! ”

Edith made no reply, but the tears unbidden filled her eyes.

“ What is the trouble this bright morning, Edith, dear ? What can I do for you ? ” she continued in a soothing voice.

After a long pause, Edith said, “ Do you remember a year ago, when we first entered your class, one Sunday afternoon we were seated at this very window together, and you were talking so earnestly with us, and asked us, if we really wanted to be Christians ? O, how I longed to tell you then all I felt, but I kept my thoughts to myself, and hushed the inward voice ;—yet the question, unbidden, has again and again come to me, and now I must answer it. I do want to be one, but I don’t know how to begin.”

“ To feel the want, and to have the desire to be a Christian, is the first step, dear Edith. But per-

haps you have no very distinct idea what it is to be a Christian. Now can you give me a simple answer to that one question ? ”

“ It is to be good and religious, to love to go to church, and to visit the sick and poor, I suppose. ”

“ Yes, it is all this, and more ; but the simple meaning of the word is,—to be in heart and life a follower of Christ ; to strive to be like Jesus,—to believe in him, as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. Now there is nothing strange or perplexing in this, as you may imagine. A little child can be a Christian, no less than a person of mature years ; for he can endeavor to follow his Saviour in all his little duties and trials, as well as one who has large responsibilities and heavy cares resting upon him. You have nothing to wait for, to begin the religious life. Begin just where you now are, and this very hour. There is no mystery in it ; only begin,—act,—pray earnestly, and you will find the first steps already taken. Resolutely determine whether you will follow Christ or not,—whether you are willing to obey Him, even when such obedience opposes your own inclinations, or

whether you prefer to live for yourself alone, and seek your own pleasure, regardless of any higher aim. But remember, that however earnestly the true choice may now be made, you cannot and will not persevere in it without the daily, hourly seeking of Divine help ; for there will be many, many struggles between the selfish inclinations so long indulged in, and the habit of living for Christ, which marks his true disciple."

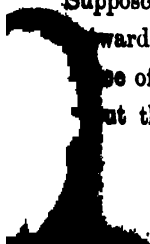
"But, cousin, I do not understand what you mean by 'living for Christ.'"

"It is striving to think and feel, to speak and act, as you know Christ would bid you, were He visibly present with you, and as He does, in truth, command you, in the words of his Gospel. Read carefully, sentence by sentence, the Sermon on the Mount. Study the character of Jesus, and see how much there is for you to strive after, to be like Him ; how much must be changed in your habits and character, and your secret thoughts and feelings. And you must not only endeavor to see it clearly, but you must pray for strength

to act accordingly. When you are tempted to be selfish, think of Christ's love, and do for others. If an angry word springs to your lips, repress it, and return good for evil. If pride rebels at any confession of wrong on your part, remember that humility is the crowning grace of the Christian, and pray to be humble. If ambition, and the desire to excel at school, make you forget home-duties, think that he who ruleth well his own spirit, is greater than all, and that even Christ pleased not himself. When tempted to mere self-indulgence, think of Him, who bade us take up the cross, deny ourselves, and follow him."

"But, cousin Mary, when I attempt to pray, God seems afar off, and I do not really love him;—all seems vague and unreal."

"Because, dear Edith, you have been willing to live so long by yourself, without really, heartily seeking to live as a child in your Father's house. Suppose that your parents provided you with every ward comfort as now,—a pleasant house, abundance of food and clothing, books, flowers, music, but that you lived wholly by yourself, in your



own room, and seldom,—perhaps only once a week, in a cold, formal manner, went to pass an hour with them,—do you think that you would care much for them, or have any warm love to them? Now, have you not been living just in this way, in the larger house God has provided for you? At every moment He is with you, asking, waiting for you to come to Him,—and if you come sincerely and earnestly, He promises through Christ to love and bless and help you. But you have been satisfied hitherto without his love, and have lived in and for yourself. Ought you to complain if a realizing faith is not at once yours,—if the Saviour, whose tender entreaties you have slighted, and whose commands you have so often left unheeded, does not at once fill your soul with his own deep peace? No, Edith,—this deeper faith, this realizing sense of God's presence, and of the love of Christ, will grow in your soul, even as you 'follow on to know the Lord.' Only begin now. Only act this very day and hour according to what you do know,—only sincerely seek forgiveness through Christ, and pray resolutely and earnestly for Divine strength

and help, for the baptism of the Spirit upon your inmost soul, and you have begun to be a Christian— You have taken the first steps in the narrow path of life eternal.”

“ And is this all, cousin Mary ? ”

“ Ah, Edith ! you will not resolutely and faithfully compare your life and character with that of Jesus, striving to be like Him, and long ask that question. You will find that to be a Christian—worthy of the name, is a life-long work, demanding the exercise of every power. ‘ Be ye perfect ;—be ye holy, even as I am holy,’—this is to be your aim and standard. But again, I would say to you, only begin, and let this Christmas be marked by your true and earnest self-consecration, and a blessedness such as you have never before known will fill your soul.—But we have talked long enough together now ; and if you would like, you shall go with me, to see a sick young friend, whom I have known for many months, as I want to carry her a few comfortable things this cold morning.”

“ And where does she live ? ”

“ About a mile from here ; but I know the walk .

and the visit will do you good,—so come ! But here's the express man, and a package addressed to me ! I wonder what it can be ! Just in time, Edith, to share the pleasure with me ! ”


And removing the outer wrappings, a beautiful box of delicate workmanship presented itself, filled with little, useful articles, the gifts of her young friends.

“ Just the things I needed ! and here are tokens from Lizzie, and Fannie, and Mary, and Ellen, and you too, Edith ;—how kind, how very kind ! remembrances from all but Annie ;—she has not forgotten me, I am sure ! ”

“ No, indeed ! ” exclaimed Edith, “ if you only knew all I know ! ”

“ About what ? ” asked cousin Mary.

But the remembrance of her selfish thoughts and words on the preceding evening, was too humiliating to her to make her wish to continue the conversation, and she was silent. “ I wonder if Annie is not sorry this morning that she gave away that half-dollar,” thought Edith,—“ I am sure I shouldn't have liked to be the only one



of the class who didn't send a present,—and no one had made known the reason, either! She was different from me, most certainly! I wonder if I shall ever be like her!”

“Come now, Edith; I must leave my treasured box till evening, to examine more fully,—for poor Alice will be waiting for me, I fear.”

The public streets were very crowded; but after a quick walk of fifteen minutes in the clear, bracing wind, they entered a narrow, close alley, in which children of all ages were noisily playing, while the broken windows on either hand, the piles of rubbish about the doors, the idle boys hanging about the steps, evinced too plainly the presence of ignorance, poverty, and want. Descending a few steps into a room half beneath the ground, into which no gleam of sunshine ever cast its cheerful ray, cousin Mary gently lifted the inner latch and entered, followed by Edith, who shrank almost instinctively from the chill, close atmosphere, and the uninviting aspect of the apartment, so strange to her inexperienced eye.

The room was as neat as could be expected in such

a place, where the mould gathered upon the walls even in midsummer, and a single window, half hidden by the pavements above, formed the only aperture for light or air. A young girl of about seventeen lay upon the only bed, apparently in a half sleep, while two little children, of six and eight years, were trying to kindle in the old, rusty stove, the damp chips they had picked up in the ship-yard. Two chairs, a cricket, a small table, an old-fashioned press containing a few clothes, and some articles of crockery, comprised all the worldly possessions of the sisters.

A Bible lay upon the bed, half open, as if the sleeper had just been reading from its sacred pages, —while in a broken vase on a shelf opposite the sick girl, was a bunch of fragrant flowers. The clean, white curtain at the window, the little stand with its white cloth at the side of the bed, on which stood a glass of jelly and some refreshing drink, the warm, thick clothing of the little girls, and their suppressed exclamation of joy, on seeing cousin Mary, showed that she was no strange visitor, but that hand, as well as heart, had been busy in promoting the good

of the little orphans, so far as lay in her power. As Edith's eye glanced rapidly around the deserted room, her eye caught sight of the beautiful bouquet, and with a sudden start she exclaimed, "Cousin Mary, these are Annie's flowers,—*that* is the reason she had no present for you !

But the invalid awoke before any farther explanation could be given, and in a feeble voice asked for water. Little Rosa sprang to the side of the bed, and handed her the mug, from which she eagerly drank ;—then turning around, she found her cousin said, "O, Miss Mary ; I'm so glad you are come ! Yesterday I didn't think that I should live to see another day, and I wanted so much to speak to you once more. But when Rosa brought me those flowers, and said a kind young lady had given them to her, I forgot all my pains. I could only look and look,—and think how good God would be to make them for me, and to send them to me on Christmas ; and they have given me such beautiful dreams of the green fields, and blue hills, and the old country home. They were better for *me* than bread,"—she added in a low voice,—“but

and dear little Katie,—how can I leave them motherless ? ”


“ I will see that they are well cared for, Alice, and have good friends and homes, and it was to tell you this that I came here this morning.”

“ O, you are too good ! Now I have no wish to live longer, but to go and be with Christ. And He has been with me, through all these long, weary days and nights, and He has given me hope and peace,—his own deep peace. And O, Miss Mary, you first led me to Him, you told me of his love, and I believed it, hard as seemed my lot in life, because you were so gentle and kind to me. And it is all true,—too true and glorious ! ”

“ And what have you been reading or thinking about, this morning, dear Alice ? ”

“ About Christ, the Good Shepherd,—and about the New Jerusalem, with its golden streets and crystal streams, and the river of the water of life. And I’ve wondered if more beautiful flowers than these can grow there. But I’m weary, very weary,”—and she sank back on her pillow, while Rosa wiped the cold dew from her forehead. In

a few moments she roused herself once more, and said, "Do you remember the first day you came here, and found me in such utter despair, because dear mother was taken from us? You bade me, 'look up and trust.' It was hard then, but it grew easier and easier every day,—and then God comforted me by those blessed promises, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. I will be to thee a father;'—and O, Miss Mary, I know that God has forgiven me, and that Christ will receive me,—and in heaven I will wait for you, and Rosa, and Katie, and the kind friend who has sent me these Christmas flowers, and then I can tell you all about how I feel to you, and love you. And now give me one kiss, just as mother used to,—and put the flowers near me, for it is growing dark,—dark and cold. And Rosa and Katie, let me feel your hands! Be kind to each other, little ones, and God forever bless you. Don't forget sister Alice. Mother is waiting for us all! Sing now, once more, and then say, good-night; for I'm very weary, and long to sleep. Good-night all!"



Cousin Mary stood beside the dying girl, and in a clear, soft tone, sang these words :—

“ Rejoice ! Rejoice ! all conflicts past,
All earthly trials o'er !
No grief can touch the trusting heart,
Upon the heavenly shore !

“ Upon thy Saviour's loving breast,
Thy waiting spirit lies,
Trusting his faithful arms of love,
To bear thee to the skies.

“ All doubts, all fears, all trials past,
Why should we grieve for thee ?
Why mourn that thy tried, faithful heart,
Should be so early free ?

“ Go to thy Father's blessed home,
Go to thy Saviour's breast,
And hear his pard'ning words of peace,
That welcome thee to rest.

“ Go, spirit, take thy golden lyre,
And bow before the throne,
And worship Him, the ' First and Last,'
The high and Holy One.


“ Go, wander by the waters still,
Where Christ his flock doth lead,
And, 'mid the pastures green and fair,
Where they shall ever feed.



“Where those who love the Saviour’s name,
Shall know each sin forgiven,
And meet thee in thy brighter Home,
The eternal Home of Heaven.”

Edith knelt in awe beside the low couch, and as the shadows of death gathered over the young girl’s countenance, she moved not nor spoke. It was a new and holy scene,—this triumph of faith over sorrow, suffering, and death! “O that it were mine!” she inwardly exclaimed. “What have I been living for,—what am I, compared with this young, motherless, suffering girl! and what might not I have done for her and these little ones, all through those long summer days, and these cold, winter storms, when I have thought only of self! She has lived for them,—she has been like Christ;—she has known God’s care, and has believed in the Saviour’s love,—and I—

“Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” said cousin Mary, as she gently drew the little ones from their sister’s last, long embrace. . . . The flowers lay within her clasped hands; and as Edith silently left the



room, it seemed as if they watched around the holy dead, and shed a halo of blessed light over the cheerless, desolate apartment.

They were Annie's Christmas gift.

* * * * *

It was Christmas Evening. A large company were assembled in the richly furnished drawing rooms, and the strains of music, and the shouts of merry laughter, rang through the large hall, while groups of children flitting to and fro, engaged in various games and amusements, evinced that it was a privileged hour for them.

"Come Edith, one more song; Lizzie has given us one, and now it's your turn!" shouted a group of merry urchins. "Come, no refusal to-night!"


An unusually thoughtful expression rested on Edith's countenance; and evidently struggling to conquer the disinclination to comply with their request, she sang a sweet, plaintive air.

Just as she completed the last strain, cousin Mary said, "Now come, Edith,—I want you and Lizzie to examine my beautiful box with me; so come for a little while to my quiet room, if you

please. I know this scene of gayety is not quite harmonious with your thoughts to-day, and it could not be otherwise;—but Edith, you have gained one victory over self, this evening,”—and as they reached the well-known quiet room, she added, “remember that Jesus recognizes his true disciples in the social party and the happy festival, no less than in the closet. Keep near to Him in heart, wherever you may be, and He will never leave you in the hour of trial.”

The box was carefully opened,—and delicate fabrics were displayed, and choice articles wrought by skilful hands; and among them lay a little manuscript book, which cousin Mary said that Annie had just given her as a Christmas gift; a little story which she had copied in a neat and beautiful hand, for her loved friend, thinking it might gratify her to read it, as a costlier gift it was not in her power to bestow.

“And now, Lizzie and Edith, if you would like, we will sit here quietly for half an hour, while I read it to you, and then we can all enjoy it together.”



“ O, that will be so pleasant ! ” they both exclaimed ; and seating themselves close beside her, she read the following pages :—

THE PROPHET OF NAZARETH.

It was the hour of the evening sacrifice. Those who had sought shelter from the intense heat of noon-day, now left their homes to exchange words of welcome and kindness, to wander by the cool waters of the Kedron, or through the streets of Jerusalem, or to collect in groups around the gateway, to listen to the words of counsel and wisdom that fell from the lips of the aged and revered.

The trumpet had already sounded, and others hastened to the holy courts of the Temple, there to offer the sacrifices prescribed by law, or, better still, to send upward that incense of heart-felt praise and gratitude, the most acceptable offering to the Most High.

The shouts of noisy mirth were hushed, the sounds of weary labor had ceased, and as the night wind swept with a refreshing coolness through the valley, bearing on its breath the perfume of thou-

sands of flowers, and the moon arose in calm and quiet splendor, shedding its peaceful radiance over the golden roof of the Temple, the multitude of those who had collected within its holy courts for praise and thanksgiving gradually dispersed, and when the last faint echoes of the lofty chant had died away, and the Priest pronounced the parting words of prayer and blessing, a deep and solemn "Amen," burst from the assembled crowd. With holy and elevated thoughts they retraced their steps, and mused of the time when the nation should again arise in her wonted glory and majesty, when He, the mighty Prince and Ruler, should appear, who would lead captive the oppressor, and let the oppressed go free ; He, before whom all nations would bow, whose kingdom was to be an everlasting kingdom, and whose dominion should endure throughout all generations.

Midnight drew near, and as the multitude turned back to their homes, there were groups of those, who, by their expressive gestures and earnest words, denoted that subjects of no light moment occupied their thoughts. Expressions of grief and

surprise, nay, even of threatening import, burst from the lips of some, while others, in a more calm and dispassionate, but not less earnest manner, seemed to be discoursing of some grave and most momentous theme.

“Father,” exclaimed Mutia, “and hast thou not indeed heard of the wonders wrought this day, by the hand of the Prophet?”

“Of the Impostor, rather, my daughter,” replied Zadoc, “for truly out of Nazareth arises no Prophet.”

“Nay, be not angry, my father; listen to me but this once, and then I will be silent.”

“Speak then, but know that the blessing of thy father will no longer rest upon thee, if thou too adjurest the faith, delivered unto us by the Prophets and holy men of old.”

At first she spoke with a faltering voice of the earnest expectations of the people, of the coming of Him, whom all hearts desired, upon whom the hopes and expectations of the whole nation were centered, but gathering courage as she proceeded, she told of the wonders that had been wrought in

their very midst, of the sick who had been healed, the blind who had been restored to sight, the lepers who had been cleansed ;—" and even a far greater wonder, my father, has this day been wrought, one which gives me the full assurance, that this great Teacher is indeed The Prophet, the chosen One of God."

" And what may it be, my daughter ? Speak freely, for thus only can I prevent thy falling into vain delusion or fatal error."

" Dost thou remember, my father, Miriam, my earliest friend, the playmate of my childhood ? "

" Ay, well," replied Zadoc, anxiously, " has aught of evil or misfortune befallen her ? "

" Yesterday," answered Mutia, " she was among us in the fulness of life, and health, and beauty ; the bridal wreath was still around her brow, and her voice mingled with joyous gladness in the hymns of praise and thanksgiving. No step was lighter, no eye beamed more brightly than hers ; but ere the shades of night had gathered over the brow of Olivet, or the incense of the evening sacrifice had yet arisen, the angel of death over-

shadowed her. Calmly and beautifully she lay, and it seemed as if the dread and silent messenger had but breathed upon her brow and passed on, fearing to touch with his dark wing aught so fair and lovely. We crossed her snowy hands upon her breast, and twining the white orange blossoms around her marble brow, kneeled beside her in grief too deep for utterance. But O, my father, how shall I tell in words that which followed! Unnoticed by us, one had drawn near, and stood beside the couch of death in the fulness of Divine love and compassion. The deep slumber of the spirit was broken, the dark shadows of the grave were rolled away, the power of death was conquered!"

As Mutia uttered these words with a thrilling energy, a young female had drawn near the listening group that surrounded her, whose manner indicated that to her, at least, the subject was one of no light interest. The thin veil, worn as was the custom with Jewish maidens, partially concealed features of no ordinary beauty, while the compressed lip, and the sad and almost mournful

expression of the full, dark eye, revealed but too plainly an anxious and sorrowing spirit. With eager attention she listened to the words of Mutia, as if every thought and faculty were centered upon one all-engrossing theme. Gradually an expression of hope lighted up her pale features, and throwing back her veil, as if unconscious of the act, and turning away with a quicker step, as the cool night-wind fanned her fevered brow, she murmured, "Ay, still there is hope, all may yet be well."

* * * * *

The crimson flush of the early dawn broke over the hills that environed the holy city; the busy hum of voices, and the tread of many feet were again heard, while the sacred priest prepared to offer upon the altar, the incense of the early sacrifice. And as the holy courts of the temple were lighted by the beams of the rising sun, the choir of Priests broke forth in a chant of praise and thanksgiving to the great Watchman of Israel.

But there was one to whom the night brought no refreshment, and the morn no gladness. With a grief too deep for tears, she had watched,

through the still hours of the night, the faint, low breathings of the child, dearer to her than life; and as the gray morn appeared, and the low restless breathings became fainter and fainter, and the small thin hand relaxed its firm hold, and fell powerless on the couch, and her ear caught the last, faint whispered "Mother," she pressed her brow in agony. With hasty steps she paced the room, and threw open the eastern lattice. Before her lay the Mount of Olives, still veiled in shadows, but beyond, the summit of Mount Tabor was glowing in the light of the early summer's dawn. "Already the morning watch," she exclaimed, "and still they tarry! Alas for me!"

Again she returned. The last murmur was hushed; in quiet beauty lay the child like some fair marble image. The bright curls that clustered around her brow, were motionless and still. The dark blue eye was closed, and the parted lips were fixed and breathless. The mother kneeled beside her child, and pressing the small, cold hand in hers, as if she must impart to it life and motion, laid her head upon the couch, and wept.

The hours sped on unconsciously, and the fervid heat of noonday again compelled the busy multitude to seek, for a few hours at least, the shelter of their homes. But there was one, who, with a rapid step, passed through the dusty streets, apparently unmindful of the scorching wind, or the burning heat of the summer sun, but who hastened on his way, like one whose business was great and urgent. The dust upon his sandals showed that he had come from far, and though greatness and divinity were impressed upon his brow, there was no long train of servants and followers to arrest the attention of the passer-by, but solitary and alone he pursued his way. . . . With a quiet step he entered the chamber of death, and approaching the lone and grief-stricken mother, he gently placed his hand upon her brow, and in a voice that thrilled her inmost soul, and stirred the deepest fountains of feeling, calmly said,—

“She is not dead, but sleepeth.”

* * * * *

“And Alice too!” whispered Edith. “*She* is not dead, but sleepeth.”

“ And Rosa and Katie, those little motherless ones,—where are they to-night ? ”

“ A kind friend is with them now,” said cousin Mary ; “ and next week Rosa is to come and live here with me ; and your mother, Edith, promises to care for little Katie, if you will agree to assist her in the charge, and sometimes give up your own pursuits to aid her. It will be a care, I know, but if Katie is with you, the little sisters can often see each other, and so be far happier than if separated. Are you willing to give some aid ? ”

“ A silent pressure of the hand was the only answer, and after a few moments’ silence Edith said, “ O, cousin Mary, I think I shall never forget this Christmas Day ! ”

“ God grant you never may ! And may He strengthen within you every good and holy purpose ; and may you indeed be his own true and loving child, a faithful disciple of your Saviour ! ”





CHRISTMAS EVENING.


"I am the Good Shepherd."





CHRISTMAS EVENING.

TWELVE months rapidly passed. Winter with its icy breath and mantle of snow, had given place to the softer airs and the delicate green and white drapery of spring ; and when the blossoms gently fell, and strewed the earth with their fragile beauty, and the sweet May flowers, and the delicate anemones, and the happy violets, had accomplished their brief but beautiful mission of hope and of love,—then followed the rich luxuriance of the long summer days, when, from the first faint flush of the early dawn, till the mellow twilight bathed the evening landscape in a softened beauty all its own, every spot and every hour seemed teeming with life and light. The fields of waving grain, the fresh-mown hay, the soft airs playing amid the deep, dark pines, the summer haze rest-



ing over the blue hills, the joyous song of the birds, the humming of the bees, and the chirping of the insects,—these had slowly but surely given place to the more gorgeous drapery of the Autumn woods in their robes of crimson and gold ;—and amid mossy dells and wooded knolls, where the violets had loved to dwell, were found the golden rod, and the aster, and the delicate frost-flower,—while Nature, silently, but in joyous hope, put off her transient robes of glory, as if in holy submission, and trust in Him who should again renew the earth in beauty and in loveliness.

And now the wintry winds again uttered their wild music through the leafless boughs of the trees, and every stream and fountain was fettered in its icy chains, and thousands upon thousands of snow-flakes fell softly upon the brown, hard earth, covering it with their pure, soft drapery.

Another Christmas day had passed, and the Christmas evening found Edith again, in her own quiet room. Books were strewn around, but they wore a neglected aspect,—while the carefully arranged easy-chair, and the thin, delicate hands,

and pale countenance of its occupant, showed that she was just recovering from a long and dangerous illness.

Even little Katie stepped lightly, as she passed the door, lest she might disturb "dear Miss Edith," and her joyful laugh was carefully suppressed, for fear of awakening the sleeper. Anxiety and sorrow for many weeks had dwelt in the household, since one, loved by all, had been hovering between life and death; and now that health began to bloom again upon the faded cheek, a chastened and quiet joy marked the holy Christmas hours.

"Cousin Mary, I am so glad you can sit with me this evening, I have been wanting to see you alone, so long a time."

"And truly glad am I to be with you, dear Edith,—and much have we all to be grateful for, when we think of the past, and of the glad hopes of this season."

"Do you remember a year ago, to-night, cousin?"

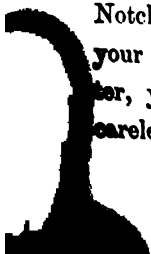
"Perfectly; but what makes you think of that evening now?"

"Because I have been thinking of the resolutions I then made, and how few, how very few of them have been kept." And Edith's voice faltered.

"But, Edith, you have improved much, very much, the past year, and I mean no flattery when I say it. Why then should you feel discouraged?"

"Then, cousin, I thought it would be easy to be a Christian,—now I feel that I am further from Christ than before."

"But that is no sure proof that no progress has been made. Do you remember when we visited the White Mountains last summer, that when at a great distance, you thought a half hour's ride would bring you to their very base ;—but hour after hour passed, and the nearer you came, the higher their summits seemed to tower above you, and it was not until you stood directly beneath their shadow, amid the sublime scenery of the Notch, that you really felt their grandeur and your own feebleness and weakness. So in character, you are really nearer to Jesus, than when careless and indifferent, but as the greatness and



holiness of his character dawns more and more clearly upon your quickened inward sight, your distance from Him seems more and more apparent. Is it not so ?”

“ But when I think over all the last year, though I have generally striven to do right, yet when I see how very, very often I have failed, I cannot feel sure that I am, in any measure, a Christian disciple.”

“ But you truly DESIRE to be one, do you not ?”

“ Yes, indeed !” replied Edith in a low voice.

“ Have you not, then, the sure word of promise, ‘ Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out.’ ‘ I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name ; thou art mine.’ ”

“ Sometimes I can take these promises to myself, and believe that God means them for me, but when day after day I break my resolutions, and find that I am so far from possessing the spirit of Christ, I dare not think myself a disciple.”

“ None of us are perfect, Edith ; but it is the desire, the aim, the daily prayer to be a Christian,

the *childlike faith in Jesus*, that give us a right to take his promises to our own hearts. He bestows his helping Spirit on all who ask sincerely ; and though you are still far from him, if you are seeking to be like him, striving to possess more and more of his spirit, He will give you of the fountain of the water of life freely."

"But I can seldom feel that these full, rich promises are meant to aid and comfort me."

"Why then are they given to you? Will you doubt God's perfect truth? He gives you the full, free assurance of pardon through the cross of Christ, if you do but turn to Him with sincere penitence for the past, and faithfully seek to keep near to Him. Ought you to distrust his word? Cast aside these doubts and misgivings which have been weighing so heavily upon you, and which have retarded your progress, and come cheerfully, trustingly, to your Saviour, with full confidence in his words of peace and love. 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest.' *Whoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely."

“O, cousin, can it be that these words are meant for me?”

“The invitation, Edith, is free to all. Longing for assured pardon and peace, it is yours, and yours only, to accept the promises. It is true you do not merit such favors. Your difficulty, in part, has arisen from thinking that you must *do* something to secure or propitiate God’s acceptance, instead of receiving his pardon through Christ as a free, full gift of love. But if you seek to love him, and to love him as manifested in Jesus, then your affections being given to him, your every act will be ‘doing’ for Christ; for all will spring from the sincere, earnest desire to be more and more like him. It will be not a service of mere constraint, but a life of love, the life of the child in its father’s house.”

“And are these blessed promises intended for all?”

“Yes; for all who are sincerely penitent for past sins, and are seeking to have the spirit of Christ within them.”

“But how shall I know, really know, that I am one of his?”

“The proofs, Edith, are scattered all through the Bible. Only apply them to yourself, and you cannot fail of a true answer. ‘He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.’ ‘Unto you therefore which believe, he is precious.’ ‘Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.’ ‘If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.’ ‘He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.’”

“Would that I might so live, cousin Mary! These long hours of pain and helplessness have made me feel, as never before, the worthlessness of all pursuits, not sanctified by the love of Jesus, and I do desire to be his.”

“And He will meet and answer your earnest desires and prayers;—fear not.”

“This has been a happy day, cousin, though I

have felt so weak and languid. Annie was with me an hour this morning, and O, what a bright, happy faith is hers ! ”

“ Yes ; she is truly a ministering spirit to all around her, for she early learned the secret of the only true happiness, or rather blessedness in life,—to forget self, and to live for Christ, and for others.”

“ And shall I ever learn it, too ? ” said Edith, in a trembling voice.

“ You are learning it, now, dear Edith, and God will aid and bless your true endeavors and earnest prayers for guidance. But you look weary, and it is time for you to try and sleep a little while, so I will place your Christmas flowers near you, for company, and leave you for an hour.”

“ Thank you, cousin ;—only place the pillows a little more comfortably, and then good-by for the present.”

The fire-light flickered, and grew more and more dim, the cold wind whistled past the windows, now and then driving the sleet and snow

heavily against the panes ; the steps of the passers-by sounded less and less distinct, while the dull rattling of carriages and omnibuses grew fainter and fainter in the far distance. Slumber gradually stole over the weary invalid, and all outward objects faded from view.

* * * * *

The soft air of a bright June morning seemed wafted through the apartment, scattering on its way the fresh blossoms of the apple and the cherry, while the bright-winged oriole flitted among the boughs that shaded the window, like a living flower of beauty, filling the air with his strains of joyous melody. The robin, too, uttered his early song of praise,—while the yellow-bird, the sparrow, and the melodious thrush, poured forth their softer, sweeter strains of harmony. And as the dusky shades of night melted into the gray dawn, and then gave place to the full, clear radiance of the rising sun,

—— “ through the great temple, earth,
Pealed the rich jubilee of grateful mirth !
The infant flowers their odor-censers swung,
Through aisled glades, air’s anthem chorus rung ; ”——




and life, and light, and joy, filled the whole earth with their beauty and glory.

A sense of this new and quickened life inspired Edith's languid frame with a strange and bounding gladness, and all feeling of weariness having suddenly passed away, she wandered out to seek amid some of her favorite haunts the full enjoyment of the holy morning hour.

Passing through a woody glade, where the green moss and the blue-eyed violets formed a soft carpet of beauty, and every twig and leaf was glistening with the morning dew, she came to a clear and sparkling fountain, the gentle murmur of whose waters filled the air with the sweetest harmony. A noble hemlock with its bending boughs shaded the crystal waters, and the abundance of flowers that grew on every side, tempted her to rest awhile within the little shady glade.

A consciousness of the fulness and depth of life filled her soul, but with it came the sense of change, and decay, and death. A delicate anemone looked up into her face with its sweet smile




of love, but just beside it lay the withered leaf of the past autumn, and the faded berry still clung to the lifeless bough of the wild rose, whose root had been laid bare by the cold storms of the previous winter. Even in this quiet spot of beauty, life and death were strangely mingled, and a feeling of sadness, of unrest, and of longing, clouded Edith's thoughtful face.

“Is there nothing that will not change and die, in this fair, beautiful world,—nothing that is not enduring?” she thought. “Is every thing we cherish and love to pass away? These sweet flowers, in another week, will droop and fade; none will gather them, or cherish their fragrant leaves. The summer sun will dry the fountain, and the green moss will become parched and shrivelled, and the little insects now filling the air with life and joy will have ended their brief existence;—and then the autumn frost will touch the leaves, and the chill wintry winds will sweep through the glade, and all will be so changed and desolate!”

As these thoughts passed through Edith's mind,

a form of wonderful beauty suddenly appeared before her. Love and truth were clearly written on the full and noble brow, while a smile of winning gentleness and hopes lighted up every feature, that all sense of fear was at once banished from her mind. "Come with me," he said, "and let me guide you ; there are places more beautiful than this for you to seek, this summer morning." She rose, and silently followed.

Soon they emerged from the shady wood, and crossing a rich and fertile meadow, they arrived at the foot of a range of hills, beyond which towered a high and rugged mountain, whose summit was hidden amid the mists and clouds. The craggy sides looked difficult and steep to climb, but as they drew near, a narrow but sure path revealed itself, on which they safely walked, notwithstanding the overhanging cliffs and the deep ravines that were often seen on either side. Flowers bloomed along the way, and little fountains gushing out among the rocks, refreshed them when weary. Slowly they travelled on, and when Edith would fain tarry and rest by the roadside after toiling in



the heat of the noon-day, or longed to return to the quiet glade in the cool and shady wood, her guide would still point upward, whispering of the only true rest there, and of the flowers that there bloomed in fadeless beauty.

How long a time had passed she knew not ;—at length, the last steep ascent was gained, when there was spread before her a scene at once familiar and strange.


There was the beautiful, wooded cemetery, in which she had often walked, and passed many a quiet hour, the sleeping-place of the dear and loved,—the same, and yet how changed ! The trees still waved as before in the golden morning light,—the deep pine groves cast their solemn shade over the quiet graves ; the peaceful lake lay in its placid beauty reflecting the rosy tints of the morning sky, and the green hills still girdled the spot in their loving embrace. But the white headstones, the elaborate works of wealth, the sculptured monuments of art, all had disappeared, and in their stead a rich and beautiful growth of flowers adorned the place, filling the

atmosphere with the sweetest fragrance. Strains of soft and unearthly music floated through the air, as if the morning breeze swept the strings of thousands of Æolian harps, while choirs of celestial voices responded to the soft, sweet harmony.

Entranced and full of wonder, Edith wandered on through the familiar paths, until she reached the grave of her cousin Helen, and that of little Mary. But the stones that marked the spot were gone, and all around bloomed flowers more beautiful than had ever before met her sight,—for such grow only on the banks of the river of the water of life.

She paused in wonder ; and gathering some of the sweet blossoms, began to twine a wreath for the grave of Alice, when, looking up, she saw that spot also crowned with flowers of the rarest beauty, while the little cross of wood that had marked the place was transformed into a crown of wonderful glory.

Hour after hour passed on, and the shades of evening began to gather over the scene ; the long



shadows lay upon the grass, and the waving boughs of the elm were radiant with the golden sunset light. But no gloomy shadows, no signs of death, filled that holy spot. There was only Life,—hopeful life. The sounds of distant music floated nearer and nearer, through the still, evening air; the songs of holy harmony blended in a deeper and fuller strain of melody, and then softly died away, until one voice alone was heard in deep and thrilling tones, “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”

Edith knelt beside the grave of Alice, in awe and in silence. She moved not, she hardly breathed. Then the gentle voice that had guided her through the narrow and often rugged path of her long journey again whispered,—“Fear not! you have not sought to guide yourself, but have willingly trusted wholly to my care and love,—and through this garden of graves must *you* pass onward to your home above. Though change and decay are written on the outward world, there are flowers that fade not, hopes that cannot die. The blossoms that bloom over graves like these

never wither, and their perennial beauty cheers the pathway of many a weary pilgrim. And now, be true to your one only Guide ; be faithful to your high calling ; and O, be earnest in the work given you to do while on earth ! Live for others ; live to labor for Christ ; and then will the flowers of faith, and hope, and love, bloom with unfading beauty over *your* grave, and through this glorious portal, you too will pass to the bright, glad home of the Redeemed ! ”

* * * * *

The storm had passed. The moon struggling through the broken clouds, shed a softened light over the pure, white drifts of snow, while an unusual stillness reigned throughout the busy streets. A sweet and happy smile lighted Edith's pale countenance, as the door was gently opened, and Annie and Lizzie softly entered.

“ We have only come to say ‘ Good-night,’ Edith, and bid you hasten and get strong enough to be with us before the New Year ; we have missed you so much to-day ! ”

“ Thank you, dear cousins,—then I shall hope

to tell you my beautiful dream, for I am too tired to talk much now. But what a happy Christmas this has been ! ”

“ Then you have enjoyed it,” said Lizzie, with an arch smile, “ even without all the good things under which our table has really groaned to-day ? ”

“ How could I possibly help it, with such loving friends all around me,—and these beautiful flowers, too ! But Annie, dear, promise me one thing.”

“ What is that, pray ? ”

“ Will you promise ? ”

“ Not until I know if I can fulfil it.”

“ Well, I want you to be my teacher this winter.”

“ *Your* teacher, Edith ! what in the world can I teach you ? You are before me, in almost all my lessons at school ; and as for music and drawing, I do not begin to compare with you.”

“ No matter ; you can teach me what is of more value than any of these things, and what I am determined to learn.”

“ I am sure I don’t understand you ! ”

“ I want you to teach me *to forget self, and to live for others*. And, Lizzie, you must often help me, too ;—for it will be a harder lesson than if I had endeavored to learn it earlier,—and you will have to be very patient with me.”

“ Be patient with yourself, dear Edith,” said cousin Mary, who had entered the room unobserved ; “ this is sometimes a harder lesson to practise than to be patient with others.”

“ But shall I ever conquer this selfishness,—this thinking of self first ? ”

“ Earnest, persevering effort and prayer, never yet failed in the conflict with sin and wrong, Edith. You cannot, will not fail, if trustingly you place your hand in that of your Saviour, and let him lead and guide you. And now that Christmas has passed, with all its peaceful memories and holy blessings, now that we have again commemorated the birth of the Prince of Peace, may his own rich peace dwell in each of your hearts, and may he indeed be to you a Saviour from all sin,

giving you his own spirit of self-sacrificing, holy love ; and may he ever abide with and in you, until we all meet in the glad Home-gathering of the Heavenly Christmas."

THE END.



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